BIG 12 PREVIEW

Sports Illustrated

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COLLEGE FOOTBALL RULES!

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DeMARCO MURRAY, RB
OKLAHOMA SOONERS

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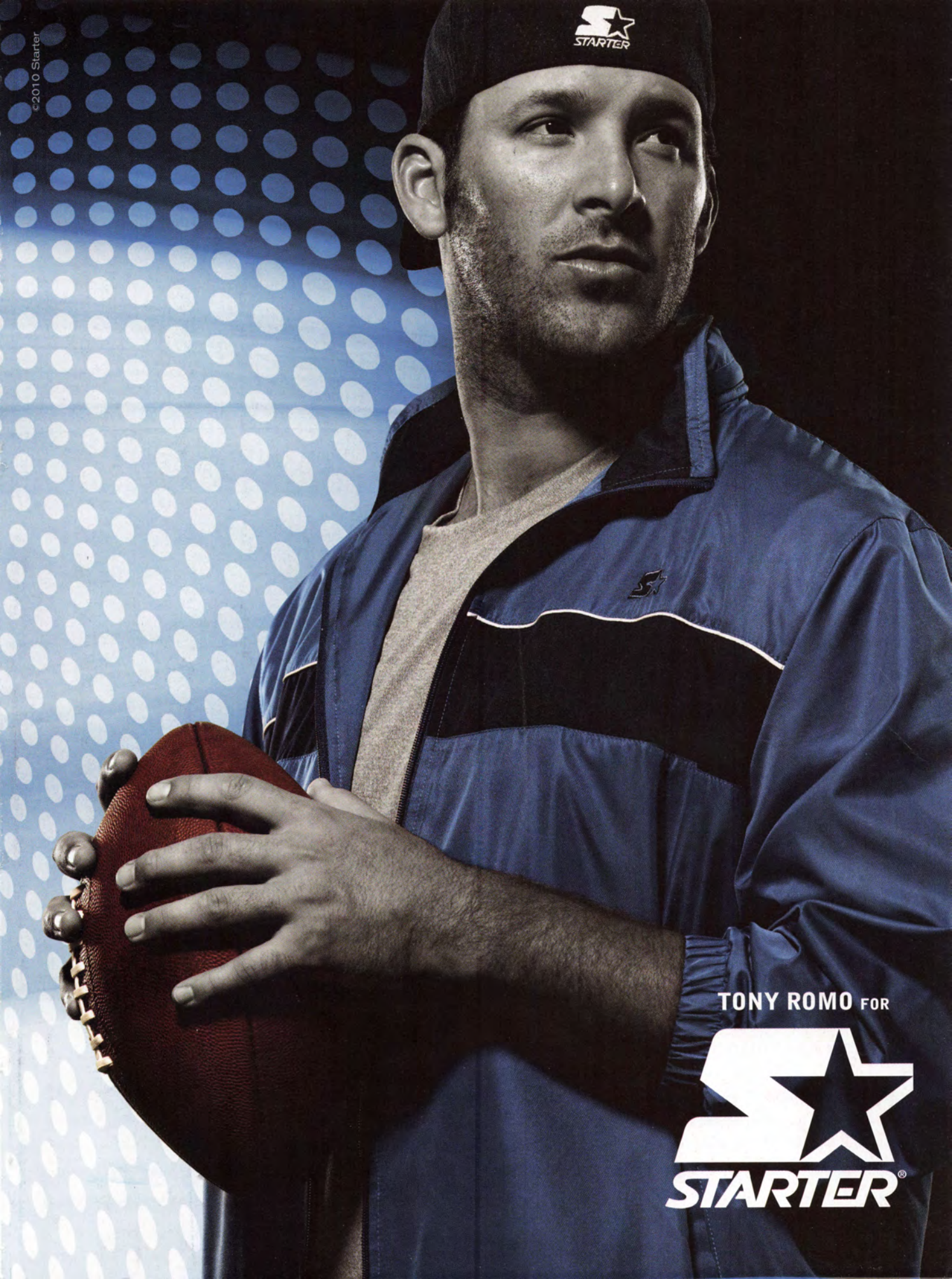
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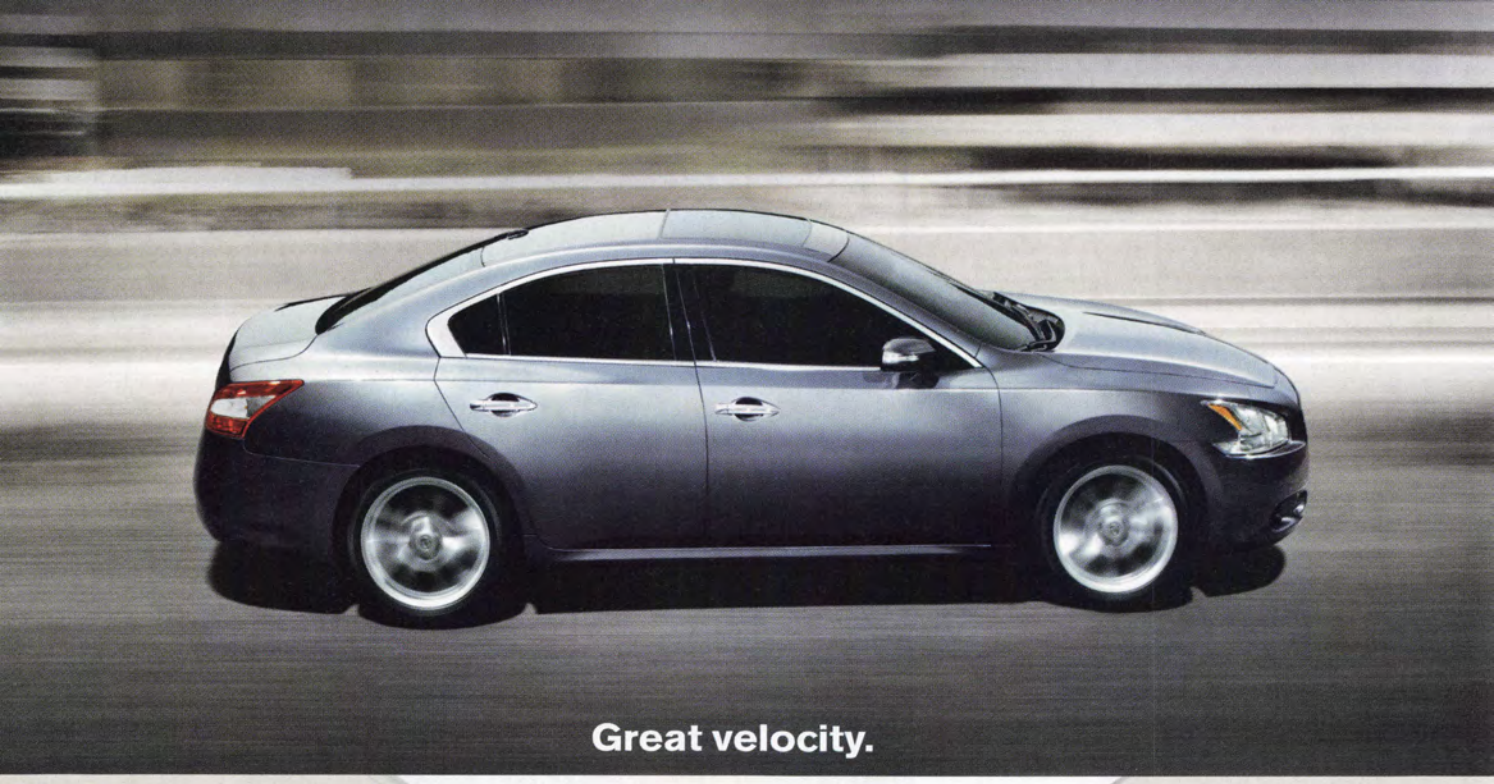

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Besides the national cover (top), SI's 2010 BIG 12 preview has regional covers for Oklahoma, Texas and Nebraska. **To order cover reprints, go to SIcovers.com**

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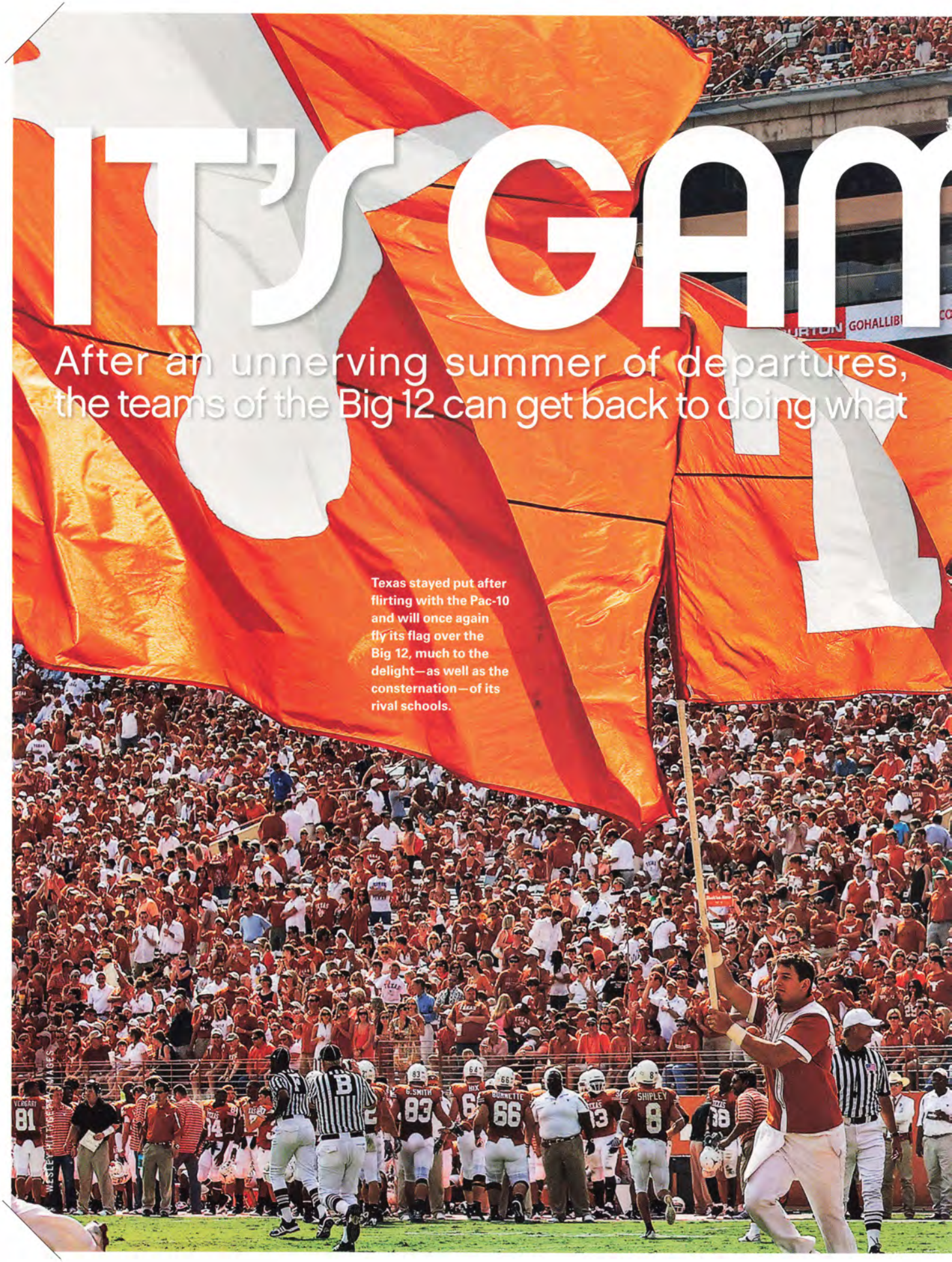
IT'S GAME

After an unnerving summer of departures, the teams of the Big 12 can get back to doing what



Texas stayed put after flirting with the Pac-10 and will once again fly its flag over the Big 12, much to the delight—as well as the consternation—of its rival schools.

WESLEY HITT/GETTY IMAGES

BIG 12 PREVIEW 2010

Sports Illustrated PRESENTS

ne TIME

doomsday predictions and business brouhaha, they do so well: playing football BY AUSTIN MURPHY

REPORTS OF THE DEATH OF THE BIG 12, IT TURNED OUT, WERE GREATLY exaggerated. The conference lives, albeit in streamlined form. There will be hard feelings, of course. But to what extent will they color the upcoming season? Will the imminent departure of two schools—Colorado and Nebraska—and the *near* departure of five others, open fresh wounds or deepen old animosities? ¶ Among the players, not so much. These guys spend the week trying to wrap their heads around a game plan, going from class to meetings to the training room to practice to training table to study hall.

It's been a historic 10 months, with commissioner Dan Beebe saving the Big 12, Oklahoma's Sam Bradford going first in the NFL draft,

Come Saturday, no one is lined up over the ball, a millisecond before the snap, stewing over the fact that the other team's athletic director engaged in back-channel realignment talks the previous spring.

Fans are a different story. Fans remember, and hold grudges. It was Nebraska AD Tom Osborne who predicted, on the day the Huskers announced their intention to join the Big Ten in 2011, that the team's final season in the Big 12 might present unique difficulties—a reference to the extra dollop of hostility sure to be heaped on the Big Red at away games.

But, really, what Big 12 schools *weren't* side-eyeing other conferences when the realignment talk reached a full boil? While none quite matched the shamelessness of Baylor, lobbying for an invite to the Pac-10, every AD in the conference was open to offers during those unsettled days. Being a member of the Big 12 as the 2010 season approaches is like going to work on the Monday morning after an office party at which everyone misbehaved. Some residual shame and recrimination is inevitable.

The Big 12 team that all other Big 12 teams resent, of course, is the one that came perilously close to killing the conference. Ever since the Big 12 began play in 1996—the Big 8 had plucked four Texas schools from the smoldering ruins of the disbanding Southwest Conference—the balance of power has been shifting south, toward Austin. The oft-cited list of anti-Texas grievances includes the accusations that the Longhorns get preferential treatment from the refs and take a disproportionately large share of the league's TV revenues.

And now, as the price for agreeing not to nuke the league into smithereens, Texas will take an even more disproportionate slice of that pie. With that and its own TV network, the Horns could end up reaping an estimated $25 million a year, some $9 million more than their reported 2009 take. Will the Longhorns'

latest power play make their Big 12 brethren despise them more? The response from Texas: Who cares? As the old saying goes, "Let them hate, so long as they fear." A month after the Longhorns lost to Alabama in the BCS title game, head coach Mack Brown brought in yet another top five recruiting class.

The conference rocked by off-season intrigue will see football as usual once the season begins. While Texas should survive a Sept. 18 trip to Lubbock (where the Horns will face a dangerous Texas Tech squad led by first-year coach Tommy Tuberville), Texas's toughest test will come two weeks later, against Oklahoma in the Cotton Bowl.

Other than a lack of depth on the offensive line, the Sooners are loaded as usual. Quarterback Landry Jones has more experience than the Longhorns first-year starter, Garrett Gilbert. Like last year, the winner of the Big 12 South will most likely be the winner of the Big 12 championship and glide into the BCS title game.

The Big 12 Lite expected in 2011 still won't be dividing its revenues equally, but it will do a better job of sharing the pain: Reduced to 10 teams, the conference will go to a round-robin schedule. Every team will play every other team. This change will shorten the conference's "exhibition season." That means more meaningful games—and not as many appearances by Division I-AA cannon fodder opponents.

The round robin will result in fewer places to hide for the Big 12's weaker teams. Instead of playing Texas and Oklahoma twice every four years, Big 12 North schools will get the Sooners and the Longhorns every season.

"What playing those teams means to me," says second-year Iowa State head coach Paul Rhoads, "is that we've got to figure out a way to beat them. And to be quite honest, we're going to use it on the recruiting trail."

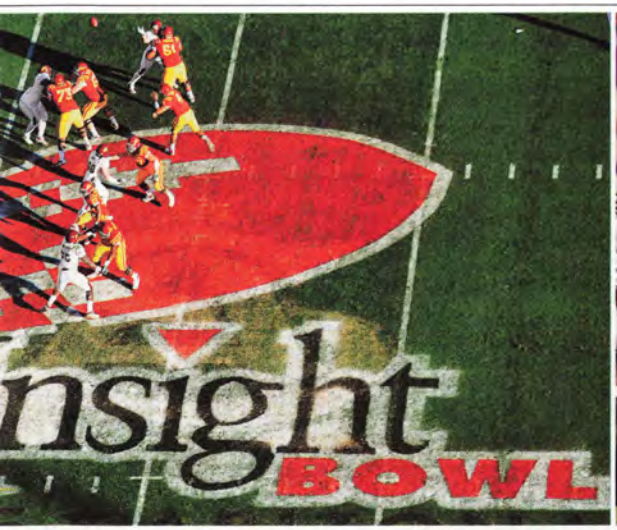
If Rhoads is up for that challenge, then no one else in the conference has an excuse. He is the magician who in 2009 led the Cyclones to their first winning season in four years, capped by an Insight Bowl victory over Minnesota.

The survival of the Big 12 was welcome news to another turnaround specialist. First-year Kansas coach Turner Gill is an ex-Nebraska quarterback who worked miracles in his four seasons as head coach at Buffalo. It seemed a shame that just when Gill stepped up to the big leagues, it looked like the Jayhawks would be banished to some mid-major purgatory—or left without a conference altogether.

Even when the westward drift of the Big 12 was on the cusp of coming to pass, it seemed forced and unnatural. Half the Big 12 to the Pac-10? Oklahoma and Oklahoma State, retracing the Joad family's journey? At one point I phoned my old friend James Hale, a radio analyst for the Sooners. "This is just *bizarre*," he said. "Stillwater belongs in the Pac-10 about as much as I belong in the Playboy Mansion."

"You could say the same about Norman," said Kevin Klintworth, an Oklahoma State associate AD whose previous employer was . . . Cal-Berkeley. Still, Klintworth allowed, "When I left Berkeley for Stillwater, I didn't think I was headed for another Pac-10 city."

As it turned out, he wasn't. And college football is the better for it. □



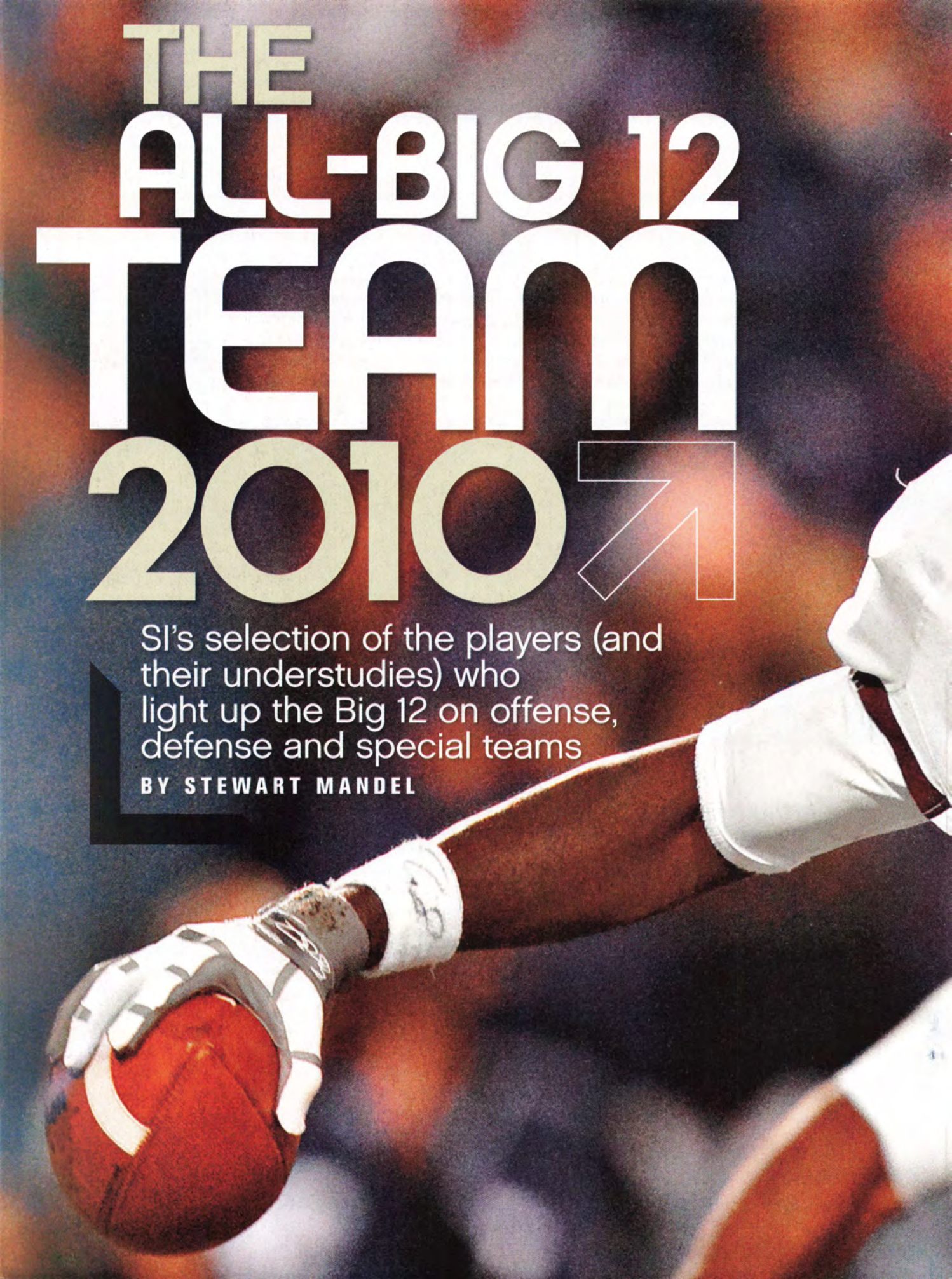
Iowa State beating Minnesota in the Insight Bowl, Bill Snyder reviving Kansas State and Osborne taking Nebraska to the Big Ten.

FROM LEFT: CODY DUTY/AP; JEFF ZELEVANSKY/GETTY IMAGES; MARK J. REBILAS/US PRESSWIRE; SEAN SEWELL/ICON SMI; ERIC FRANCIS/GETTY IMAGES

THE ALL-BIG 12 TEAM 2010

SI's selection of the players (and their understudies) who light up the Big 12 on offense, defense and special teams

BY STEWART MANDEL



QB
JERROD JOHNSON
TEXAS A&M SENIOR

JEFF MOFFETT/ICONSMI

TE
TIM BIERE
KANSAS JUNIOR

2010 ALL-BIG 12 OFFENSE

A tandem from the state of Oklahoma dominates the rush, and look out for a pair of powerful linemen coming out of the Rockies

QB **JERROD JOHNSON** TEXAS A&M SENIOR
The Aggies' dual threat led the conference in total offense (4,085 yards) last season, including 439 yards on Thanksgiving night against No. 2 Texas, and 413 versus Georgia in the Independence Bowl.

SECOND TEAM **BLAINE GABBERT** MISSOURI JUNIOR

RB **KENDALL HUNTER** OKLAHOMA STATE SENIOR
Hunter put a happy ending on an injury-plagued 2009, running for 94 yards on nine carries in the Cotton Bowl. He'll look to regain his sophomore form, when he was the nation's seventh-leading rusher (119.6 yards per game).

SECOND TEAM **DANIEL THOMAS** KANSAS STATE SENIOR

RB **DeMARCO MURRAY** OKLAHOMA SENIOR
Last year Murray's 705 rushing and 522 receiving yards were both second on the Sooners' statistical board. Coach Bob Stoops isn't shy about his expectations for the versatile back's final season. "I'd like to see him at 1,900 [yards]," Stoops told fans this spring.

SECOND TEAM **ALEXANDER ROBINSON** IOWA STATE SENIOR

WR **RYAN BROYLES** OKLAHOMA JUNIOR
The latest in a long line of game-breaking Sooners receivers, Broyles had 1,120 yards and 15 touchdowns last season, including 13 catches for 156 yards and three scores in OU's Sun Bowl win over Stanford.

SECOND TEAM **NILES PAUL** NEBRASKA SENIOR

WR **SCOTTY McKNIGHT** COLORADO SENIOR
The SoCal native has caught a pass in each of his 37 games, a school record, and ranks second in team history with 165 receptions. His 74.4 yards per catch in '09 were second only to Broyles's among this year's Big 12 returnees.

SECOND TEAM **DETRON LEWIS** TEXAS TECH SENIOR

TE **TIM BIERE** KANSAS JUNIOR
With the departure of prolific receivers Dez Briscoe and Kerry Meier, the 6' 4", 260-pound target should become a big part of Kansas's passing game.

SECOND TEAM **ANDREW JONES** MISSOURI JUNIOR

OT **NATE SOLDER** COLORADO SENIOR
A potential first-round draft pick, Solder stands 6' 9", 300 pounds, yet can run a 4.8 40. He graded 80% or better in every game last season.

SECOND TEAM **CORY BRANDON** OKLAHOMA SENIOR

OG **RYAN MILLER** COLORADO JUNIOR
Another monstrous Buffaloes blocker (6' 8", 310), Miller played on all 851 Colorado snaps last season, allowing just three sacks.

SECOND TEAM **STEPHEN GOOD** OKLAHOMA JUNIOR

C **TIM BARNES** MISSOURI SENIOR
One of the nation's top centers, Barnes anchors a strong Tigers offensive line that has four experienced starters returning to the team.

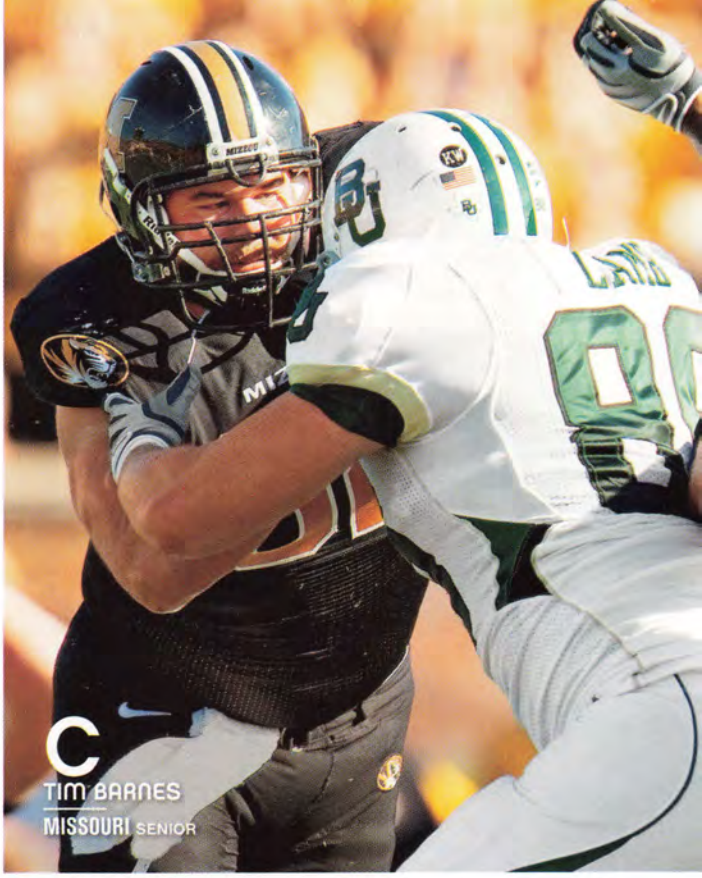
SECOND TEAM **BEN LAMAAK** IOWA STATE SENIOR

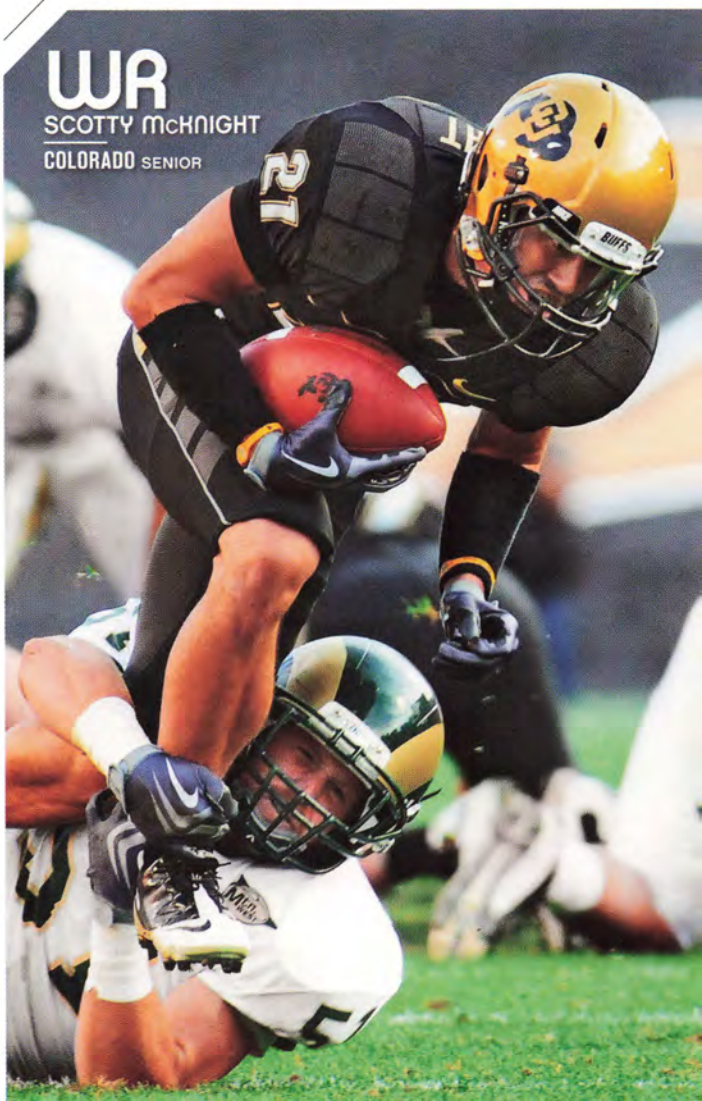
OG **PATRICK LEWIS** TEXAS A&M SOPHOMORE
After landing a starting job early last season, the Louisiana native was named a Freshman All-America and an All-Big 12 honorable mention.

SECOND TEAM **LANE TAYLOR** OKLAHOMA STATE SOPHOMORE

OT **KYLE HIX** TEXAS SENIOR
After starting 28 games on the right side, the 6' 7", 320-pound veteran takes over at the important left tackle spot this season.

SECOND TEAM **TANNER HAWKINSON** KANSAS SOPHOMORE





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LB
TRAVIS LEWIS
OKLAHOMA JUNIOR

S
BLAKE GIDEON
TEXAS JUNIOR

2010 ALL-BIG 12 DEFENSE

It's no surprise that there are Longhorns aplenty in the list of defensive all-stars. They're joined by a cast of tough tacklers from all over the region

DE **JEREMY BEAL** OKLAHOMA SENIOR
A third-team All-America last season and two-time all-conference selection, Beal was a 2009 Hendricks Award finalist and earned an honorable mention for Big 12 defensive player of the year.

SECOND TEAM **PIERRE ALLEN** NEBRASKA SENIOR

DT **JARED CRICK** NEBRASKA JUNIOR
While playing alongside Heisman finalist Ndamukong Suh last season, Crick was recognized by coaches as first-team All-Big 12. The Huskers will rely on him to maintain their highly ranked defense.

SECOND TEAM **ADRIAN TAYLOR** OKLAHOMA SENIOR

DT **COLBY WHITLOCK** TEXAS TECH SENIOR
The 6' 2", 287-pound nosetackle should thrive in new coach Tommy Tuberville's 3-4 scheme. Last season Whitlock had three sacks and 45 total tackles (eight for loss).

SECOND TEAM **PHIL TAYLOR** BAYLOR SENIOR

DE **SAM ACHO** TEXAS SENIOR
A Lott Trophy semifinalist in '09, his first season as a starter, Acho led the Longhorns with 10 sacks and also had 14 tackles for loss to go with four fumble recoveries, which tied for most in the nation.

SECOND TEAM **ALDON SMITH** MISSOURI SOPHOMORE

LB **TRAVIS LEWIS** OKLAHOMA JUNIOR
The Sooners' leading tackler during each of his first two seasons (with 253 total), Lewis was a semifinalist for last year's Butkus Award and will be a prime contender again this time around.

SECOND TEAM **BRIAN DUNCAN** TEXAS TECH SENIOR

LB **DREW DUDLEY** KANSAS SENIOR
An honorable mention all-conference performer last season, Dudley finished second on the Jayhawks with 88 tackles. The team named the College Station, Texas, product its most improved defensive player.

SECOND TEAM **EMMANUEL ACHO** TEXAS JUNIOR

LB **VON MILLER** TEXAS A&M SENIOR
The hybrid rush end-linebacker turned in an outstanding junior season, finishing with more sacks (17) than any player in the country.

SECOND TEAM **HULDON THARP** KANSAS SOPHOMORE

CB **AARON WILLIAMS** TEXAS JUNIOR
In his first season starting at corner, Williams had two sacks and 44 tackles (six for loss). He's also blocked four punts in his Longhorns career.

SECOND TEAM **CURTIS BROWN** TEXAS SENIOR

S **BLAKE GIDEON** TEXAS JUNIOR
Gideon, who's started every game since he arrived on campus two years ago, picked off six passes last season.

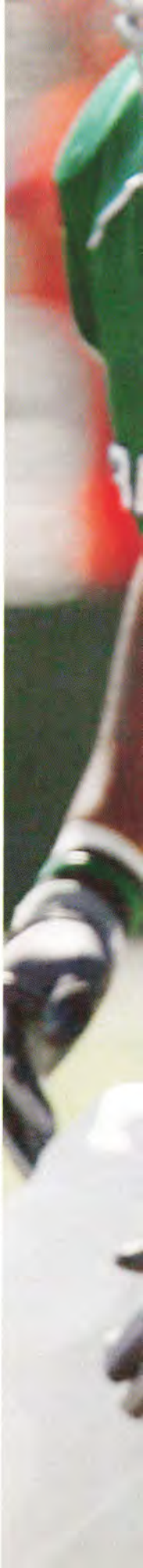
SECOND TEAM **QUINTON CARTER** OKLAHOMA SENIOR

S **DAVID SIMS** IOWA STATE SENIOR
The juco transfer was named Big 12 Defensive Newcomer of the Year after notching 88 tackles and five interceptions.

SECOND TEAM **CODY DAVIS** TEXAS TECH SOPHOMORE

CB **PRINCE AMUKAMARA** NEBRASKA SENIOR
In his first season as a starter, the Glendale, Ariz., native intercepted five passes and emerged as a potential 2011 first-round NFL draft pick.

SECOND TEAM **CARL GETTIS** MISSOURI SENIOR



CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: MARK J. REBILAS/US PRESSWIRE; WD/ICON SMI; DUANE LAVERTY/WACO TRIBUNE HERALD

DT
JARED CRICH
NEBRASKA JUNIOR

K
GRANT RESSEL
MISSOURI JUNIOR

2010 ALL-BIG 12 SPECIAL TEAMS

There's just one North Division rep on the first team versus three from the South. One thing they all have in common: a strong pair of legs

K **GRANT RESSEL** MISSOURI JUNIOR
In his first year as the Tigers' kicker, Ressel broke an NCAA record for accuracy (98.5%) by making 26 of 27 field goals and all 39 extra points. The onetime walk-on is 26 points away from helping Mizzou surpass the national record of 262 consecutive extra points made.

SECOND TEAM **ALEX HENERY** NEBRASKA SENIOR

P **DEREK EPPERSON** BAYLOR SENIOR
The two-time All-Big 12 selection (both athletic and academic) punted 54 times for 2,420 yards last season, a performance that earned him an All-America honorable mention. His 42.4-yard career punting average ranks fourth alltime for the Bears.

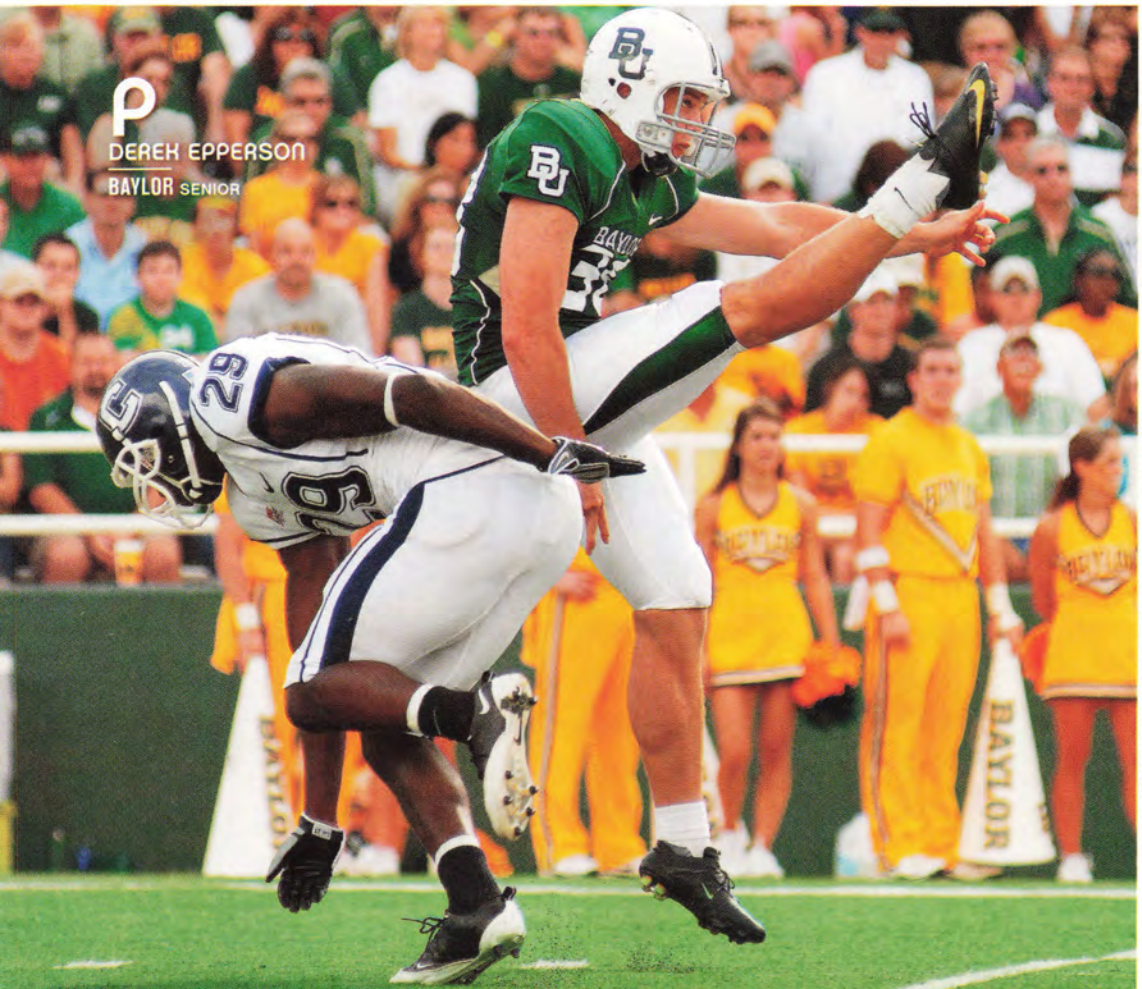
SECOND TEAM **TRESS WAY** OKLAHOMA SOPHOMORE

KR **CYRUS GRAY** TEXAS A&M JUNIOR
The speedy all-purpose threat has broken kicks for touchdowns in each of his first two seasons. Last year he was the Aggies' second-leading rusher, with 757 yards, and had three 100-yard games.

SECOND TEAM **D.J. MONROE** TEXAS SOPHOMORE

PR **RYAN BROYLES** OKLAHOMA JUNIOR
The Sooners' explosive returner ranked third nationally with a 15.87-yard average on 31 returns. In 2009 the Norman native also set an OU single-season record with 89 catches and tied a school mark with 15 touchdowns, becoming the first receiver to lead the team in scoring in at least 72 years.

SECOND TEAM **NILES PAUL** NEBRASKA SENIOR



P
DEREK EPPERSON
BAYLOR SENIOR

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: JOHN RIVERA/ICON SMI; DENNY MEDLEY/US PRESSWIRE; SIMON BRUTY

PR
RYAN BROYLES
OKLAHOMA JUNIOR

Texas trounced Oklahoma State 41–14 last season, though running back Fozzy Whittaker was held to just 15 yards. The potential scene of Fozzy's revenge? November 13 in Austin.

BIG 12 SOUTH

DARREN CARROLL

BAYLOR BEARS

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51 Tommy Tuberville's mom is following him

52 An injury couldn't knock out Baron Batch

BAYLOR BEARS

A fresh start, take two: With their talented play-caller healthy again, the Bears will try to find enough muscle on defense to get their season into the black **BY ELIZABETH McGARR**

THE VITALS

COACH Art Briles (3rd year) 8–16 (3–11 in Big 12)
CO-OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS Randy Clements, Philip Montgomery
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR Brian Norwood
2009 RECORD 4–8 (1–7, 6th in Big 12 South)
FINAL AP RANK NR
RETURNING STARTERS Offense 7, Defense 5
WINS OVER THE LAST FIVE SEASONS 5, 4, 3, 4, 4
2009 RANKINGS Division I-A (Big 12)
RUSHING OFFENSE 108 (10)
PASSING OFFENSE 37 (7)
TOTAL OFFENSE 85 (10)
RUSHING DEFENSE 97 (12)
PASSING DEFENSE 75 (6)
TOTAL DEFENSE 94 (10)

ROBERT GRIFFIN III'S RIGHT KNEE FELT AS IF IT WERE GOING TO collapse. The sophomore quarterback had taken an awkward hit during the opening drive of 2009's third game, but as he stood on the sideline and watched Northwestern State take a 7–0 lead, he knew he didn't have a choice. "I had to get back in there and give the guys a spark," says Griffin, who guessed he had hyperextended his knee but played the remainder of the half anyway, throwing for 226 yards and three touchdowns in what would be a 68–13 romp. The Bears hadn't scored that many points in a game since 1942.

The next day, Baylor's hopes of putting together its first winning season since '95 all but vanished. An MRI revealed that Griffin, who had thrown for 2,091 yards and 15 touchdowns and rushed for another 843 yards and 13 scores as a Freshman All-America the year before, had torn his ACL. Despite a valiant effort by backup Nick Florence, who helped orchestrate a 40–32 upset of Missouri in November, the Bears struggled to a 4–8 finish.

BIG 12 2010 PREVIEW
BIG 12 SOUTH

THE BIG IF CAN GRIFFIN RETURN TO HIS PREINJURY FORM AND LEAD BAYLOR TO **ITS FIRST WINNING SEASON IN THE BIG 12?**

Griffin will often look for Kendall Wright downfield.

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER
4 Sam Houston State
11 Buffalo
18 at TCU
25 at Rice

OCTOBER
2 Kansas
9 Texas Tech (in Dallas)
16 at Colorado
23 Kansas State
30 at Texas

NOVEMBER
6 at Oklahoma State
13 Texas A&M
20 Oklahoma

SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

The Bears face a daunting roadblock in TCU but have a chance to be .500 or better when they go to Texas and start the hardest part of their season.

Griffin, meanwhile, rehabbed and spent three games in the booth with binoculars, sitting next to defensive coaches and gaining a different perspective on analyzing coverages. "It helped me a lot this spring in reading defenses," says Griffin, who participated in noncontact drills wearing a knee brace as a precaution. He estimates he was at about 90% in spring practice and expects to fully recover well before the season opener.

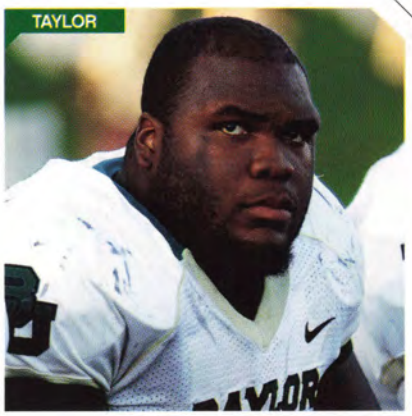
Just as important as a healthy Griffin will be the state of the Bears' defense, which had a Big 12 second-worst 18 sacks last year and allowed 405.6 yards per game, third worst in the conference. The coaches need more consistency from senior linebacker Antonio Johnson and will count on him to lead a group that includes second-year defensive linemen Phil Taylor and Gary Mason Jr. and newcomers Tevin Elliot and Ahmad Dixon.

If these young players fulfill their potential—Baylor's last two recruiting classes were its highest ranked since joining the Big 12—and win at least half their games, the Bears could make a run at their first bowl game in 16 years. "When the team saw me start walking, people were getting motivated," says Griffin. "When they see me line up out there again in a game, it's going to make everybody very excited and ready to play."

Jay Finley ran for 91 yards in 2009's opener before injury slowed him.

SEAN MEYERS/ICON SMI (RIGHT); BRIAN A. WESTERHOLT/GETTY IMAGES

BAYLOR
23



PROJECTED LINEUP

OFFENSE

QB	ROBERT GRIFFIN III*	NICK FLORENCE*
RB	JAY FINLEY	TERRANCE GANAWAY
FB	KAERON JOHNSON	ERIK WOLFE
WR	LANEAR SAMPSON*	TRAVIS MCCLAIN
WR	KENDALL WRIGHT*	TERRANCE WILLIAMS
TE	BRAD TAYLOR	JEROD MONK
LT	DANNY WATKINS*	TROY BAKER
LG	CAMERON KAUFHOLD	CYRIL RICHARDSON
C	PHILIP BLAKE*	STEFAN HUBER
RG	JOHN JONES	ROBERT T. GRIFFIN
RT	IVORY WADE*	JOE KORBEL

DEFENSE

DE	GARY MASON JR.	TEVIN ELLIOT
DT	TRACY ROBERTSON	CHRIS BUFORD
NG	PHIL TAYLOR*	NICOLAS JEAN-BAPTISTE
DE	ZAC SCOTTON*	JARED EDWARDS
LB	ELLIOT COFFEY	EARL PATIN
LB	CHRIS FRANCIS	CHRIS MCALLISTER
LB	ANTONIO JOHNSON*	LEQUINCE MCCALL
CB	CHANCE CASEY*	ROMIE BLAYLOCK
SS	BYRON LANDOR	PRINCE KENT
FS	TIM ATCHISON*	MIKE HICKS
CB	CLIFTON ODOM	ANTAREIS BRYAN

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	BEN PARKS*	AARON JONES
P	DEREK EPPERSON*	BRODY TRAHAN
KR	TERRANCE WILLIAMS*	MIKAIL BAKER*
PR	KRYS BUERCK	TERRANCE WILLIAMS

**Returning starter*

TELLING NUMBER

.054 BAYLOR'S BIG 12 ROAD WINNING PERCENTAGE (THREE OF 53), BY FAR THE WORST IN THE LEAGUE.

FROM LEFT: JAMIE SQUIRE/GETTY IMAGES; BRETT DAVIS/US PRESSWIRE; MANNY FLORES/ICON SMI; SCOTT BOEHM/GETTY IMAGES

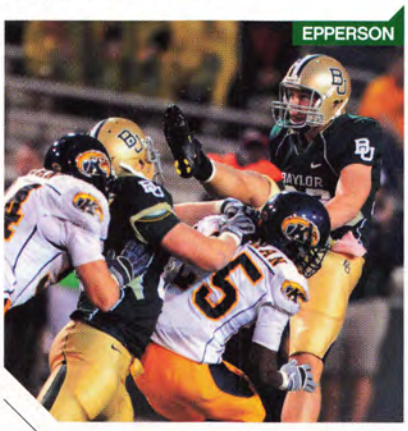
KEY RETURNEES

RB **JAY FINLEY** SENIOR
Finley rushed for 212 yards in the first two games of 2009 and, despite missing three of the next four games with a right-ankle injury, still led the Bears with 370 rushing yards for the year. After undergoing surgery in March, he should be 100% this fall.

LB **ANTONIO JOHNSON** SENIOR
Expect Baylor's top returning tackler (77) to step into a leadership role on the outside. Says Coach Briles, "He's a guy who brings passion, effort, speed, intensity and great chemistry [to] a team."

WR **KENDALL WRIGHT** JUNIOR
Wright, who earned an All-Big 12 honorable mention as a sophomore, has led the team in receiving yards and receptions for the past two years, catching 66 passes for 740 yards in 2009.

P **DEREK EPPERSON** SENIOR
Baylor's only 2009 All-Big 12 selection who is back with the team, Epperson finished sixth in the nation in punting average (44.81). The senior, whose younger brother Ryan punts for A&M, was also a semifinalist for the Ray Guy Award in '08.


EPPERSON

BREAKOUT PLAYER

DE **ZAC SCOTTON** JUNIOR
Providing a veteran anchor on defense

Briles calls the 6' 6", 275-pound Scotton, who started eight games last season, "a sleeper guy" for the Bears. "He's long and can run and plays with a very mean demeanor," says the coach. As one of five returning defensive starters, Scotton should add to his 22-tackle (13 solo) total from 2009.

TOP RECRUIT

RG **ROBERT T. GRIFFIN** JUNIOR
A contender at right guard—as soon as he's healthy

A juco transfer from Navarro (Texas) College, Griffin (no relation to the quarterback) spent three weeks in spring drills before undergoing shoulder surgery to fix a nagging injury. At 6' 6" and 335 pounds, he should be a significant asset once he's ready to go.

COACH'S Q&A

ART BRILES

ON THE BEARS' HUNGER AND THE VALUE OF THE BIG 12

SI: *What impressed you the most during spring practice?*
AB: Our mentality. Our guys are very hungry, and honestly very confident. . . . We certainly feel like we have a whole lot to prove, and that's a good way to be.

SI: WHAT CAN PEOPLE EXPECT TO SEE FROM THE BAYLOR OFFENSE THIS YEAR?

AB: WE'RE GETTING GUYS THAT BELONG IN THE BIG 12 SOUTH. WE WANT TO ESTABLISH THE RUN AND BECOME A DOMINANT, PHYSICAL TEAM UP FRONT WITH A TOUGH-GUY MENTALITY. THAT'S WHAT WE HOPE OUR REPUTATION WILL BE.

SI: *What about Robert Griffin III's impact?*
AB: Robert brings an element of unpredictability, which is good because one thing you don't want to be on the offensive side is predictable. He is mobile and he can throw, and we've got some of the best receivers we've had around here in a long time.
SI: *The school hasn't had a winning season since the end of the Southwest Conference, but what is the most positive thing about being in the Big 12?*
AB: When you have done something in the Big 12, you have *done something.* There are no shallow victories. There are no lonesome wins. Every win in this league is a major win.

BAYLOR
Riddell
Riddell
BAYLOR

TAILOR-MADE FOR THE GRIDIRON

He's been a hockey player and a fireman. But three years ago this Canadian couldn't have imagined he'd become a football standout BY ELIZABETH McGARR

GROWING UP IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, DANNY WATKINS DIDN'T KNOW MUCH about football, and he didn't really care to. Yet here he was, 22 years old, talking to the gridiron coaches at Butte College in Oroville, Calif., about going out for the team. "You could probably make a living off playing football," they told him. "Have you looked at yourself?"

At 6' 4" and 310 pounds, Watkins was pretty much the ideal size for an offensive lineman. "I thought, This is the thing to do in the States, so maybe I'll give it a try," he says.

Hockey was the thing to do in Canada. Watkins began playing the sport at age six, and later he took up rugby as well, at 14. Instead of pursuing either sport in college, though, he joined the fire department in his hometown of Kelowna. "He was driving the fire truck before he was of age to go to the pub for a beer," recalls his mother, Vicki Watkins Rigden.

It was Watkins's job with the fire department that ultimately brought him to Butte, which has a well-respected fire academy. "The plan was to go to Butte for a couple years and go back to the fire hall," says Watkins. "But I started playing football, and I found that a lot of the satisfactions that I got with the fire hall I was getting with football—working with the guys and the camaraderie, and you're together through the good and the bad."

So Watkins stuck with it. He played every game his freshman year, in 2007, and the following season was named juco first-team All-America after helping the Butte offense gain 398.3 yards per game while the team went 11–0. And when Art Briles and Baylor recruited him to take the place of All-America Jason Smith, the No. 2 pick of the 2009 NFL draft, Watkins spoke with his family and the fire chiefs back home and decided to see where football could take him.

With only two years of experience, Watkins was still learning the sport when he arrived in Waco. "One of the biggest things for him was terminology," says Bears offensive line coach Randy Clements. "You'd tell somebody to 'block down' or 'block gap,' and he would look at you like, What do you mean?"

Watkins, though, was a quick study, and he started at tackle every game last season. Says Briles, "He's a coach's treat, a guy who makes you proud to be in the profession because he's like a sponge. He absorbs everything."

In addition to solidifying his knowledge of blocking schemes during his first year at Baylor, Watkins learned to be more physical. "If he gets his hands on you, you're not going anywhere," says quarterback Robert Griffin III, who will be the main beneficiary of Watkins's growth.

He's also fun to be around, says Griffin, who describes his teammate as a "happy-go-lucky guy" and admits that while the players joked about Watkins's Canadian accent at first, these days "everybody just wants to hear him talk."

Watkins, now 25, could have gone to the CFL after last season, but by staying with the Bears there's a good chance his NFL draft stock will improve. (He's currently projected as a seventh-rounder.) "I think he'll be the best left tackle in the Big 12 this year," says Briles. "His name will be called next April. No question." □

EXTRA POINT ON MAY 2 THE BRITISH COLUMBIA LIONS SELECTED WATKINS WITH **THE FOURTH OVERALL PICK OF THE CFL DRAFT.**

Watkins anchored the O-line in his first Bears season.

MANNY FLORES/ICON SMI (LEFT); JOHN RIVERA/ICON SMI

OKLAHOMA SOONERS

Signal-caller Landry Jones had better adjust to the spotlight. He'll need more consistency—and better protection—to take OU to the top **BY ANDREW LAWRENCE**

THE VITALS

COACH Bob Stoops (12th year) 117–29 (72–16 in Big 12)
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR Kevin Wilson
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR Brent Venables
2009 RECORD 8–5 (5–3, T-3 in Big 12 South)
FINAL AP RANK NR
RETURNING STARTERS Offense 7, Defense 5
WINS OVER THE LAST FIVE SEASONS 8, 11, 11, 12, 8
2009 RANKINGS Division I-A (Big 12)
RUSHING OFFENSE 77 (7)
PASSING OFFENSE 11 (3)
TOTAL OFFENSE 23 (3)
RUSHING DEFENSE 8 (2)
PASSING DEFENSE 20 (3)
TOTAL DEFENSE 8 (3)

WHEN LANDRY JONES BEAT OUT DREW ALLEN FOR THE BACKUP quarterback spot behind 2008 Heisman Trophy winner Sam Bradford last off-season, it hardly made headlines. But when Bradford suffered a grade-three shoulder separation in the '09 season opener, then reaggravated it five games later and was lost for the year, Jones became an instant media curiosity. By his last start—a 31–27 Sun Bowl victory over Stanford in which Jones threw for a career-high 418 yards—he was a national sensation.

That effort capped a 3,198-yard passing season for Jones, who bettered Bradford's freshman passing mark by 77 yards. Whether Jones will be able to improve on any more of his predecessor's records will depend on his becoming more consistent, especially on the road. Amid six strong performances at Memorial Stadium (where he racked up a combined 18 touchdowns and just four interceptions while completing 62.1% of his passes) he sprinkled in five forgettable outings away from home—all but one of them losses—in which he threw for only five scores against nine picks with an accuracy of just 54.9%. Overall his 14 interceptions were the most in the conference and 13th-worst in the nation.

Jones gets back essentially the same complement of playmakers he had last season—chief among them is senior running back DeMarco Murray, who's nearing the 2,500-mark in career-rushing yardage, and wide receiver Ryan Broyles, whose 89 catches last year set an Oklahoma single-season record.

But the offensive line, which was already struggling in 2009, is now especially vulnerable at left tackle. Gone is senior Trent Williams, who left Norman for the NFL after 38 career starts made him the Sooners' most experienced lineman. Replacing him is Donald Stephenson, a 6' 6" 309-pounder whose pile-driver body never made it onto the field last year because of a seasonlong suspension for undisclosed behavioral issues.

If Stephenson, who has the talent to make a difference on the line, stays out of trouble, Jones gains a critical protector. That, combined with a season's worth of experience, should improve his consistency on the pass and help him lead Oklahoma to news really worth celebrating.

BIG 12 2010 PREVIEW
BIG 12 SOUTH

THE BIG IF DO THE SOONERS HAVE SOMEONE CAPABLE—AND RELIABLE ENOUGH—TO FILL THAT GAPING HOLE ON THE BLIND SIDE?

Ben Habern centers a line that must step up in 2010.

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER
4 Utah State
11 Florida State
18 Air Force
25 at Cincinnati

OCTOBER
2 Texas (in Dallas)
16 Iowa State
23 at Missouri
30 Colorado

NOVEMBER
6 at Texas A&M
13 Texas Tech
20 at Baylor
27 at Oklahoma State

SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

Oklahoma should be wary of Florida State and Cincinnati before meeting Texas in the Red River Rivalry, the game on which any title hopes may hinge.

As a freshman starter Jones was a surprise—a mostly pleasant one.

GARY ROTHSTEIN/ICON SMI (RIGHT); J.P. WILSON/ICON SMI

OKLAHOMA
SOONERS

ALEXANDER

PROJECTED LINEUP

OFFENSE

QB	LANDRY JONES*	DREW ALLEN
RB	DEMARCO MURRAY*	JERMIE CALHOUN
WR	RYAN BROYLES*	MOSSIS MADU
WR	DEJUAN MILLER*	JAZ REYNOLDS
FB	MARSHALL MUSIL	BRANDON CROW
TE	ERIC MENSIK	TRENT RATTERREE
LT	DONALD STEPHENSON	JARVIS JONES
LG	STEPHEN GOOD*	BRONSON IRWIN
C	BEN HABERN*	BRIAN LEPAK
RG	TYLER EVANS	TAVARIS JEFFRIES
RT	CORY BRANDON*	JOSH ALADENOYE

DEFENSE

DE	JEREMY BEAL*	DAVID KING
DT	ADRIAN TAYLOR*	STACEY MCGEE
DT	JAMARKUS MCFARLAND	CASEY WALKER
DE	FRANK ALEXANDER	JUSTIN CHAISSON
LB	RONNELL LEWIS	AUSTIN BOX
LB	TOM WORT	DANIEL FRANKLIN
LB	TRAVIS LEWIS*	JAYDAN BIRD
CB	DEMONTRE HURST	GABE LYNN
SS	SAM PROCTOR*	JOSEPH IBILOYE
FS	QUINTON CARTER*	MARCUS TRICE
CB	JONATHAN NELSON	JAMELL FLEMING

SPECIAL TEAMS

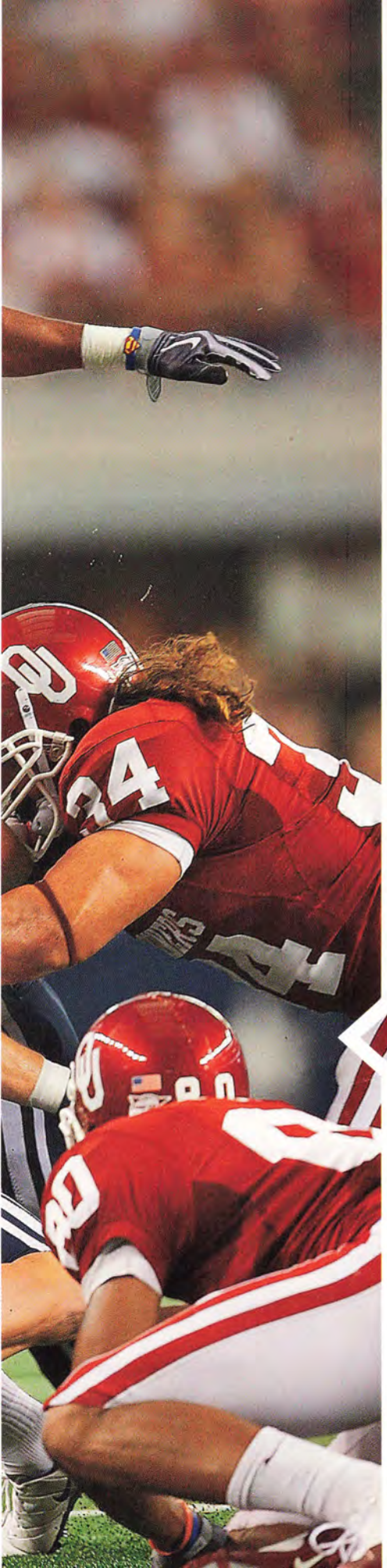
K	PATRICK O'HARA	JIMMY STEVENS
P	TRESS WAY*	JIMMY STEVENS
KR	RYAN BROYLES*	MOSSIS MADU
PR	RYAN BROYLES*	DEMONTRE HURST

**Returning starter*

TELLING NUMBER

45 CAREER TOUCHDOWNS FOR DEMARCO MURRAY, THE MOST OF ANY RETURNING PLAYER IN THE NATION.

FROM LEFT: CHRIS COZZONE/US PRESSWIRE; RONALD MARTINEZ/GETTY IMAGES; J.P. WILSON/ICON SMI; GREG NELSON



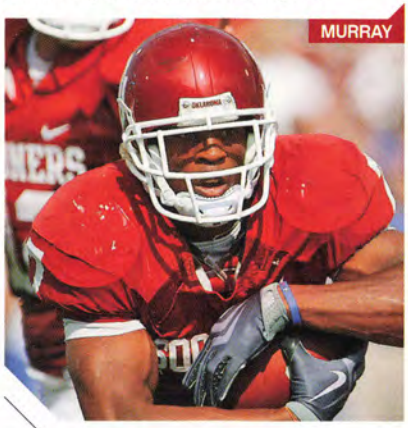
KEY RETURNEES

FS **QUINTON CARTER** SENIOR
He benches 345 pounds ... and has a 37-inch vertical leap. The 6' 1" 200-pounder made 88 tackles, picked off four passes and recovered a fumble on the way to second-team All-Big 12 honors in 2009.

LB **TRAVIS LEWIS** JUNIOR
With Gerald McCoy in the NFL, Lewis will be asked to fill Oklahoma's emotional-leadership vacuum, as well as the holes created by opposing offensive lines. He led the team in tackles in '08 (144) and '09 (109).

P **TRESS WAY** SOPHOMORE
Way's cherubic mug belies his devilishly strong left foot. Last year he averaged 45.7 yards per punt—first in the Big 12, second in Sooners history and third nationally. Of his 61 punts on the season, he blasted 22 for 50 yards or more.

RB **DEMARCO MURRAY** SENIOR
With this Las Vegas product the on-field returns are big—he ranks 12th in OU's career rushing yards (2,471), fourth in career all-purpose yards (4,661) and fifth in career touchdowns (45)—but his health is a gamble: He missed five games over the past three years.


MURRAY

BREAKOUT PLAYER

WR **RYAN BROYLES** JUNIOR
Local son makes good on the gridiron

The Norman-raised Broyles emerged as the conference's most dynamic playmaker in '09. His 1,120 receiving yards leads all returning Big 12 receivers. And he did this with a bum shoulder blade, which he fractured against Miami last October. Now fully recovered, the Biletnikoff Award favorite should be even more dangerous after the catch and in the open field.

TOP RECRUIT

WR **KENNY STILLS** FRESHMAN
His hops and wheels complement Broyles

An early enrollee, the 6-foot 183-pounder proved a quick study at OU's spring game, logging a game-high 84 yards on six catches—one of which was a leaping TD grab. His 3,041 receiving yards is an alltime San Diego–area high school record.

COACH'S Q&A

BOB STOOPS

ON OVERTIME, REPLAY AND HIS COACHING BROTHERS

SI: *Do you prefer the college or NFL version of the overtime rule?*
BS: Neither. In the NFL system I still believe whoever wins the toss has a greater opportunity. I prefer the college system, but it needs to be adjusted, [because] it's just down to who has the better kicker. If you put the ball at the 40- or 45-yard line, you'd have to earn a field goal or a touchdown. I'm surprised they haven't looked at that, because it seems you'd want to reward defense as well as offense.
SI: *What about replay?*
BS: I prefer the NFL version, but with all the different venues we play at in college and the different levels of football, I don't see that [the college game] could have the technology that they have.

SI: WHEN YOU'RE NOT SCOUTING FOR THE SOONERS, WHAT FOOTBALL DO YOU WATCH FOR FUN?

BS: I FOLLOW GUYS WHO PLAYED FOR ME, COACHES I'VE COACHED WITH AND, OF COURSE, ANY HIGH SCHOOL OR MY KIDS' [YOUTH LEAGUE] GAMES.

SI: *Do you and your brothers [Ron, defensive coordinator at Cardinal Mooney High in Youngstown, Ohio; Mike, Arizona head coach; and Mark, Florida State defensive coordinator] ever have time to get together?*
BS: We do. Recently I was with my siblings for a fund-raiser for our high school. We also have a bocce tournament every year in [our hometown of] Youngstown.

OKLAHOMA
WATKINS
6
ZITMANSKI
6

PORTRAIT OF A PERFECTIONIST

Those who lowballed Jeremy Beal's draft stock only fueled his determination to refine his play. The NFL's loss is Oklahoma's gain BY ANDREW LAWRENCE

WHEN TIME RAN OUT ON THE SOONERS' 2009 SEASON—AN 8–5 CAMPAIGN that saw the team reach its 11th consecutive postseason game despite having lost Heisman Trophy winner Sam Bradford in October—there was no question that Bradford, two-time All-America defensive tackle Gerald McCoy and '09 All-America offensive tackle Trent Williams would lead OU's annual march of prospects to the NFL. What remained in doubt, however, was whether defensive end Jeremy Beal would join them. After all, the 6' 3" 267-pounder had made his own case for the pros during the season. As a fourth-year junior he had 11 sacks (just one fewer than conference leader Ndamukong Suh of Nebraska, the second pick in the draft) and 19 tackles for loss (3½ more than McCoy, the No. 3 pick).

And yet despite those favorable comparisons, Beal was regarded as no better than a second-rounder by NFL talent evaluators. A player with a bigger ego might have taken that as a slight. But for Beal it sealed his decision to return to school and steeled a resolve to mine his vast upside reserves. "I really want to be the best player I can be," says Beal, who hails from Carrollton, Texas. "Right now I'm not there yet, but I'm close to it."

He gets a step closer to that goal with each long day he puts in at the Sooners' football facilities, and during the off-season those days were many. Beal labored to fine-tune his technique on the field and through film study, agonizing over his smallest mistakes—even when the outcome was positive. "My first tackle of the BYU game, for instance, I kinda got hit into [it] and made a tackle for a loss," says Beal, recalling one celluloid moment that led to self-flagellation. "Even though the play ended three yards deep in the backfield, in my mind I was like, That was terrible. I messed up the play. That's just how I think."

Once on the field, though, Beal makes it a point not to let his perfectionism paralyze his play. "I'm not gonna be perfect on every snap," he adds. "That's where guys mess up, trying to do too much. I just try to play within the system."

It's a system fueled by yet another crop of talented playmakers on the line. Bookending it on the other side is Frank Alexander, a 6' 4", 251-pound junior whose nose for the big play (last year he returned a fumble for a score against Idaho State) helped him move from a three-man rotation into a starting spot. Senior tackle Adrian Taylor, a 6' 4" 302-pounder, dropped ballcarriers for losses in six of his 13 starts in 2009. Even tackle Jamarkus McFarland, a 6' 2", 293-pound sophomore who earned a starting role thanks to stellar play late last season, was a force in limited action. Though he had only 2½ sacks in '09, they resulted in 21 yards lost.

EXTRA POINT BEAL RETURNED ALSO TO FINISH HIS MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES DEGREE, **WHICH HE HOPES TO PARLAY INTO COACHING.**

Beal had a career-high 12 tackles against Texas.

The defensive line's promise, says Beal, could help close some unfinished business for Oklahoma, which hasn't quite swallowed the bitter aftertaste of coming up short in the '08 national championship. This season the road to redemption will, the team hopes, wind through Arlington, Texas, site of the conference title game. "The expectation is to first win the Big 12 championship," Beal says. "If we do that, we'll play for the national championship. We have the talent to do it." And, just as significant, the Sooners have a leader in Beal who won't rest until he's exhausted it all. □

JACKSON LAIZURE/US PRESSWIRE (LEFT); JIM COWSERT/ICON SMI

OKLAHOMA STATE COWBOYS

The Pokes' offense is depleted, so its defensive counterpart will have to rise to the occasion and hold off opponents with a sharpened attack **BY ANDREW LAWRENCE**

THE VITALS

COACH Mike Gundy (6th year) 36–27 (19–21 in Big 12)
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR Dana Holgorsen
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR Bill Young
2009 RECORD 9–4 (6–2, 2nd in Big 12 South)
FINAL AP RANK NR
RETURNING STARTERS Offense 4, Defense 4
WINS OVER THE LAST FIVE SEASONS 4, 7, 7, 9, 9
2009 RANKINGS Division I-A (Big 12)
RUSHING OFFENSE 22 (1)
PASSING OFFENSE 99 (10)
TOTAL OFFENSE 70 (7)
RUSHING DEFENSE 11 (4)
PASSING DEFENSE 89 (8)
TOTAL DEFENSE 31 (4)

FOR THE PAST FIVE SEASONS OKLAHOMA STATE'S PUNCH HAS come from its offense. But the losses of three-year starting quarterback Zac Robinson, talented but temperamental wideout Dez Bryant and four fifths of the offensive line have dealt serious body blows to a unit that staggered to a 10th place finish in the Big 12 in passing offense last year. In 2010 the defense will have to make up the difference, but early indications are that it isn't shy about mixing it up. Since former Cowboys defensive lineman–linebacker Bill Young returned to Stillwater as coordinator in 2009, Oklahoma State's defense has risen from 93rd in the country to 31st last season. Junior safety Markelle Martin thinks the Cowboys would've cracked the top 20 if they had been even more aggressive. "We were O.K. as far as being in the right spot and doing our job," he says, "but we needed to step up and make plays."

That challenge falls to a veteran group. Senior middle linebacker Orie Lemon, who missed all of last season with a knee injury after coming in second on the team with 90 tackles in '08, returns to anchor a front seven that allowed just 95.8 rushing yards per game. He'll be helped by senior end Ugo Chinasa, Oklahoma State's reigning sacks king (6½ last season), and junior end Jamie Blatnick, who finished second in quarterback hurries (five).

But the real menace is Martin. After missing the first two games of the season with a hip injury, the Wichita Falls, Texas, product started 11 games and made 45 tackles, the most of any Cowboys returnee. Martin's ideal size (6' 1", 198 pounds) and athleticism (he runs a 4.43 40-yard dash and has a 37-inch vertical leap) allow him to cover a lot of ground in the secondary—which he'll have to, as OSU has little depth in the defensive backfield. (The team had just four corners on scholarship in the spring.)

Martin says he has to hold on to more interceptions for the Cowboys' D, which was responsible for a handful of victories last season, to be more of a difference-maker. "A lot of times I looked past the play and took my eye off the ball," says the safety, who broke up 11 passes but failed to snag any of the Pokes' 18 picks last year. With a bit more focus, Oklahoma State's defense could be a real knockout.

BIG 12 2010 PREVIEW
BIG 12 SOUTH

THE BIG IF CAN THE DEFENSIVE FRONT SEVEN **KEEP THE PRESSURE ON OPPOSING OFFENSES** AND OFF OF OSU'S WEAKENED SECONDARY?

LB James Thomas has shown big-play potential.

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER
4 Washington State
11 Troy
18 Tulsa
30 Texas A&M

OCTOBER
8 at Louisiana-Lafayette
16 at Texas Tech
23 Nebraska
30 at Kansas State

NOVEMBER
6 Baylor
13 at Texas
20 at Kansas
27 Oklahoma

SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

Along with a tough slate in their division, the Pokes must reckon with the Huskers, who boasted the nation's stingiest scoring defense in '09.

Receiver Hubert Anyiam had one of his three '09 TDs against A&M.

DAVID J. PHILLIP/AP (RIGHT); DARREN CARROLL

COWBOYS
84
84
OSU
16
A&M

BIG12REPORT
THE COWBOYS BIG 12 SOUTH

PROJECTED LINEUP

OFFENSE

QB	BRANDON WEEDEN	CLINT CHELF
RB	KENDALL HUNTER*	TRAVIS MILLER
WR	HUBERT ANYIAM*	COLTON CHELF
WR	JUSTIN BLACKMON	ISAIAH ANDERSON
WR	JOSH COOPER*	CHARLIE MOORE
WR	TRACY MOORE	JUSTIN HORTON
LT	NICK MARTINEZ	PARKER GRAHAM
LG	JONATHAN RUSH	BRANDON WEBB
C	GRANT GARNER	CASEY LABRUE
RG	LANE TAYLOR*	ANTHONY MORGAN
RT	LEVY ADCOCK	JORDAN TAORMINA

DEFENSE

DE	JAMIE BLATNICK	RICHETTI JONES
DT	CHRIS DONALDSON	NIGEL NICHOLAS
DT	SHANE JARKA	ANTHONY ROGERS
DE	UGO CHINASA*	DARIUS HART
LB	JAMES THOMAS	JOE MITCHELL
LB	ORIE LEMON	TOLU MOALA
LB	JUSTIN GENT*	LERON FURR
CB	ANDRAE MAY	MALCOLM MURRAY
SS	MARKELLE MARTIN*	MATHIES LONG
FS	JOHNNY THOMAS*	DAYTAWION LOWE
CB	BRODRICK BROWN	DEVIN HEDGEPETH

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	DAN BAILEY*	QUINN SHARP
P	QUINN SHARP*	M. REICHENSTEIN
PR-KR	JOSH COOPER	VICTOR JOHNSON

**Returning starter*

TELLING NUMBER

0 THE COWBOYS' TURNOVER MARGIN IN '09. OSU FORCED 30—A SEVEN-WAY TIE FOR 11TH IN THE LAND—BUT COUGHED UP JUST AS MANY.

FROM LEFT: KARL ANDERSON/ICON SMI; ALBERT PENA/CSM; JOHN GREEN/CSM; MANNY FLORES/CSM

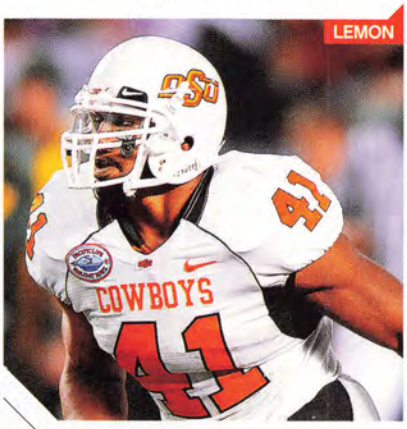
KEY RETURNEES

WR **HUBERT ANYIAM** JUNIOR
The 6-foot 198-pounder will be depended on to fill much of the offensive void left by Dez Bryant. Last season Anyiam led the Cowboys with 42 catches and 515 yards and trailed only Bryant in touchdowns, with three.

RB **KENDALL HUNTER** SENIOR
The all-purpose back was hobbled by injuries last year, running for just 382 yards on 89 carries in eight appearances. Now fully healthy, he hopes to recapture the All-America form that he flaunted as a sophomore in 2008, when he led the Big 12 in rushing yards (1,555) and finished fourth in total touchdowns (17).

K **QUINN SHARP** SOPHOMORE
Sharp's 45.1-yard punting average in '09 was the second-best single-season mark in OSU history and the best since 1971. He was just as effective handling kickoffs, leading the nation with 35 touchbacks.

LB **ORIE LEMON** SENIOR
Lemon shouldn't still be in Stillwater, but a knee injury last September forced him to take a redshirt. If the dominant form he flashed this spring is any indication, the 6' 1" 240-pounder will be a bully to ballcarriers.



LEMON

BREAKOUT PLAYER

WR **JOSH COOPER** JUNIOR
Don't overlook this slippery wideout

At 5' 11" and 192 pounds Cooper seems undersized for a No. 1 receiver, but he's a perfect fit for offensive coordinator Dana Holgorsen's scheme, which exploits holes in zone coverage. With his sure hands, precise routes and explosiveness after the catch, Cooper invites comparisons with Wes Welker—who blossomed under Holgorsen at Texas Tech.

TOP RECRUIT

LB **SHAUN LEWIS** FRESHMAN
Had 19 tackles for loss as a high school senior

At Hightower High in Missouri City, Texas, the 6' 1" 210-pounder showed his heat-seeking style of play with 228 tackles over his final two high school seasons, emerging as one of the best outside linebacker prospects in the Lone Star State.

COACH'S Q&A

MIKE GUNDY

ON THE SPREAD OFFENSE AND FACING HIS BROTHER, CALE

SI: *How did the spread become the official offense of the Big 12?*
MG: I'm not sure I would call it official, but if you get guys who are disciplined and can make some plays, the spread is a dangerous way of attacking defenses.
SI: *Is it an offense that's here to stay, or is it a fad?*
MG: Things tend to go in cycles in football, because coaches and players evolve and figure out how to counter things, but getting the ball in your playmakers' hands and putting those playmakers in a position to be successful will never go out of style.

SI: WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS THIS YEAR?

MG: WE'RE BREAKING IN NEW STARTERS, BUT A LOT OF THOSE GUYS HAVE GOTTEN INTO GAMES ALONG THE WAY. WITH THE LEVEL OF PLAYERS WE HAVE, WE'LL BE COMPETITIVE NO MATTER WHO WE PLAY.

SI: *What is it like coaching against your brother, Cale, who coaches running backs at Oklahoma?*
MG: It's probably harder on my mom than anyone when our teams face each other. I'm happy for the successes he's had, and he would say the same about me. Our kids enjoy being around each other. The fact that we're so close in proximity from Stillwater to Norman works out well.

OSU
NIKE
DAMS
OSU
COWBOYS
4

BACK TO SCHOOL FOR AN EDUCATION

Once a promising minor league pitcher, quarterback Brandon Weeden is stepping up to the controls of an explosive new offense BY ANDREW LAWRENCE

FOUR YEARS AGO BRANDON WEEDEN WAS A FADING PRO PITCHER FACING A major decision about his future. The 6' 4", 224-pound righthander, whose low-90s velocity had enticed the New York Yankees into making him their first draft pick when he was just an 18-year-old high school junior, was foundering in the minors, where his ERA had slid to a miserable 6.03 by his fifth season. That number threatened to rise even higher if he couldn't quiet the tendinitis in his throwing shoulder. As he saw it he had two choices: either go under the knife and hope his shoulder returned to big league strength or quit baseball and start over again—as a college quarterback. "It was a no-brainer," says the 26-year-old redshirt junior. "I gave baseball all I had and hit a wall. I knew that if I couldn't pitch, I was coming back to school, getting my degree and playing football."

Never mind that Weeden hadn't been under center since 2002—but the Edmond, Okla., product had been brilliant for Santa Fe High then, throwing for a state-high 2,863 yards and 29 touchdowns while leading the Wolves to their first playoff appearance. With the Cowboys, though he failed to unseat three-year starter Zac Robinson atop the depth chart, Weeden proved a considerable upgrade over backup Alex Cate. This was made plain when the two were called on to replace the injured Robinson in a prime-time home game against Colorado last November. Cate started the game and went 0 for 9 with an interception; Weeden finished it 10 of 15 with two touchdowns, rallying the Cowboys to a 31–28 victory that paved the way to their fourth straight postseason berth, in the Cotton Bowl. (Cate, believing he'd be doomed to another season holding a clipboard, left the program in February.)

Whether Weeden can lead the Cowboys to another postseason appearance will hinge on his continued mastery of the spread offense, which has been expanded by new coordinator Dana Holgorsen. The coach learned the system as an assistant at Texas Tech before refining it as coordinator at Houston, which he turned into the nation's top-ranked attack in '09. To open up things in Stillwater, Holgorsen has tasked passers with reading the entire field—instead of just half of it, as before—and making use of all their available receivers, instead of deploying some as decoys. The increase in targets means Weeden will have to make up his mind quickly, but that's something he had to do often on the mound. "It kinda takes me back to my pitching days," he says. "I get to call my own game."

To improve his decision making Weeden spent the spring studying hours of Holgorsen's Houston film to get a feel for the faster-paced spread, and he also worked on quickening his release. Overall the shorter motion puts less strain on his shoulder. "I get dead-armed just like any other quarterback, but it's nowhere close to the pain I felt throwing a baseball," he says.

EXTRA POINT AS A PRO PITCHER, WEEDEN **MADE THE '03 NEW YORK–PENN LEAGUE (CLASS A) ALL-STAR TEAM** WITH A 3.72 ERA IN FIVE STARTS.

Weeden spent the spring studying Holgorsen's system.

Still, even though Weeden won't be throwing 100 times or more a game, he knows better than to expect a light load under Holgorsen. Last year the coach had Cougars starter Case Keenum hurling it 50 times a game. How much work is Weeden in for? "It'll be a balance," says the quarterback. "My job is to make the right call, whether [the play is a] run or pass." In other words Weeden will be in charge of his own destiny, and that's the way he likes it. □

SUE OGROCKI/AP (LEFT); NATE BILLINGS/THE OKLAHOMAN/AP

TEXAS LONGHORNS

With a ramped-up ground game and a quarterback who is ready to lead, perennial powerhouse Texas will be the team to beat this season **BY ELIZABETH McGARR**

THE VITALS

COACH Mack Brown (13th year) 128–27 (80–16 in Big 12)
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR Greg Davis
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR Will Muschamp
2009 RECORD 13–1 (8–0, 1st in Big 12 South)
FINAL AP RANK 2
RETURNING STARTERS Offense 5, Defense 7
WINS OVER THE LAST FIVE SEASONS 13, 10, 10, 12, 13
2009 RANKINGS Division I-A (Big 12)
RUSHING OFFENSE 61 (5)
PASSING OFFENSE 22 (6)
TOTAL OFFENSE 28 (5)
RUSHING DEFENSE 1 (1)
PASSING DEFENSE 19 (2)
TOTAL DEFENSE 3 (1)

TEXAS HEAD COACH MACK BROWN HAS LED THE LONGHORNS TO 10 or more wins in each of the past nine years, so it seems strange to hear him talk about needing to make changes and returning to "some normalcy" on offense.

"Colt [McCoy] was so accurate that we went crazy in throwing the ball, and we got further away from the running game than we meant to," says Brown, who a year ago began planning how Texas would return to a more balanced attack once McCoy, who's now with the Cleveland Browns, had left Austin.

Longhorns fans shouldn't expect a return to the three-yards-and-a-cloud-of-dust offenses of yore, especially with strong-armed sophomore quarterback Garrett Gilbert taking over, but Texas will run more. In the past two seasons no running back has gained more than 580 yards or carried more than 116 times. Now the added rushing responsibility falls on sophomore Tre' Newton and junior Fozzy Whittaker.

Whereas McCoy lined up in the shotgun, Gilbert will usually be under center, which should play to his natural talents. "We feel like we need to run the ball and be physical but, with Garrett's arm strength, also allow him to get more balls downfield with play action," says Brown. All-America receiver Jordan Shipley is gone to the NFL, so junior Malcolm Williams and senior James Kirkendoll, who struggled with consistency in '09, start out as Gilbert's main downfield targets.

Defensively, the coaches are adjusting to the losses of safety Earl Thomas, tackle Lamarr Houston, end Sergio Kindle and tackle Roddrick Muckelroy, all of whom went in the top four rounds of the NFL draft. Fortunately for Texas the roster is deep, especially in the secondary, which is loaded with experienced upperclassmen.

The question on everyone's mind, of course, is how Gilbert will respond after being thrust into the spotlight in relief of an injured McCoy during the national title game. "[Against Alabama] it was obvious to everybody that he is very talented and actually gave us a chance to win because he is such a confident young man," says Brown. "He took that experience [and] turned it into a positive and was a great leader in the spring."

Overall a return to normalcy sounds imminent.

BIG 12 2010 PREVIEW
BIG 12 SOUTH

THE BIG IF CAN RUNNING BACKS WHITTAKER AND NEWTON HANDLE THE LOAD IN THE **LONGHORNS'** RETOOLED RUNNING GAME?

Newton scored six rushing touchdowns last year.

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER
4 AT RICE
11 WYOMING
18 AT TEXAS TECH
25 UCLA

OCTOBER
2 OKLAHOMA (in Dallas)
16 AT NEBRASKA
23 IOWA STATE
30 BAYLOR

NOVEMBER
6 AT KANSAS STATE
13 OKLAHOMA STATE
20 FLORIDA ATLANTIC
25 TEXAS A&M

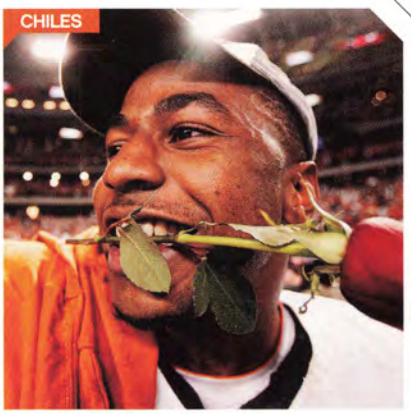
SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

The last time UCLA came to Austin, in 1997, the Bruins whupped Texas 66–3; road games in Lubbock and Lincoln could be unfriendly.

The 5' 10", 195-pound Whittaker (28) had 53 carries and four TDs in '09.

DARREN CARROLL (RIGHT); BRETT DAVIS/US PRESSWIRE

TEXAS
28
TEX
UCF
20


CHILES

PROJECTED LINEUP

OFFENSE

QB	GARRETT GILBERT	SHERROD HARRIS
RB	TRE' NEWTON*	FOZZY WHITTAKER
WR	JOHN CHILES	MARQUISE GOODWIN
WR	JAMES KIRKENDOLL*	DESEAN HALES
WR	MALCOLM WILLIAMS*	GREG TIMMONS
TE	GREG SMITH	BARRETT MATTHEWS
LT	KYLE HIX*	PADEN KELLY
LG	MICHAEL HUEY*	THOMAS ASHCRAFT
C	DAVID SNOW	GARRETT PORTER
RG	TRAY ALLEN	MASON WALTERS
RT	BRITT MITCHELL	LUKE POEHLMANN

DEFENSE

DE	SAM ACHO*	TEVIN MIMS
DT	KHEESTON RANDALL*	TAYLOR BIBLE
DT	CALVIN HOWELL	ASHTON DORSEY
DE	ALEX OKAFOR	EDDIE JONES
LB	DRAVANNTI JOHNSON	PATRICK NKWOPARA
LB	EMMANUEL ACHO*	DUSTIN EARNEST
LB	KEENAN ROBINSON*	RYAN ROBERSON
CB	AARON WILLIAMS*	CURTIS BROWN*
SS	CHRISTIAN SCOTT	KENNY VACCARO
FS	BLAKE GIDEON*	NOLAN BREWSTER
CB	CHYKIE BROWN	ERYON BARNETT

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	JUSTIN TUCKER	WILLIAM RUSS
P	JUSTIN TUCKER	JOHN GOLD
KR	D.J. MONROE*	MARQUISE GOODWIN
PR	AARON WILLIAMS	MARQUISE GOODWIN

**Returning starter*

TELLING NUMBER

2.2 AVERAGE YARDS PER RUSH SURRENDERED BY THE TEXAS DEFENSE LAST SEASON, THE FEWEST IN THE NATION.

FROM LEFT: RONALD MARTINEZ/GETTY IMAGES; TONY GUTIERREZ/AP; ALBERT PENA/CSM; ANDREW CARPENEAN/US PRESSWIRE

KEY RETURNEES

LT **KYLE HIX** SENIOR
In the off-season Hix, a fixture at right tackle since the 2007 Holiday Bowl, drew the assignment of protecting Garrett Gilbert's blind side. (At 6' 7" and 320 pounds he's suited to the task.) Along with guard Michael Huey, Hix is one of two returning starters on the O-line.

RB **TRE' NEWTON** SOPHOMORE
As a redshirt freshman Newton (son of former Dallas Cowboys lineman Nate) appeared in every game and led the team with 552 rushing yards on 116 carries. Expect Newton's numbers to grow this fall.

CB **AARON WILLIAMS** JUNIOR
He started all but one game at cornerback in '09 and finished the year with 44 tackles, two forced fumbles and three interceptions. He'll lead the secondary with All-America Earl Thomas gone to the NFL.

QB **GARRETT GILBERT** SOPHOMORE
The former Gatorade and *Parade* national player of the year and two-time Texas Class 4A champion has big shoes to fill but should do fine thanks to his strong arm, height (6' 4") and football pedigree. (His father, Gale, played eight seasons in the NFL.)

GILBERT

BREAKOUT PLAYER

SS **CHRISTIAN SCOTT** JUNIOR
Ready to make big plays with his eligibility restored

Scott played in every game as a redshirt freshman in 2008 (he had 15 tackles) and likely would have started in '09 if he hadn't been academically ineligible. The 6' 1" 215 pounder was cleared to play in time for the BCS title game last January and saw action on special teams. He had a standout spring—but replacing Thomas will be a tall order.

TOP RECRUIT

WR **DARIUS WHITE** FRESHMAN
Had two TDs in the Under Armour All-America game

The 6' 3" 200-pounder is one of the stars of a Horns recruiting class that was ranked third in the nation by Rivals.com. A *Parade* All-America, White had 2,293 yards receiving and 35 TDs over his final three seasons at Dunbar High in Fort Worth.

COACH'S Q&A

MACK BROWN

ON THAT TITLE-GAME LOSS AND HIS COACHING FUTURE

SI: *What was the hardest part about losing the national championship game?*
MB: I thought we had a great chance to win going in. I hated it for Colt McCoy and our kids that we didn't get to show Alabama and the football fans the game that they were going to get if Colt [who was injured in the first quarter] had been able to play.

SI: HOW LONG DID IT TAKE YOU TO MOVE ON FROM THE LOSS?

MB: A MONTH OR SO. THEN SOME OF MY FRIENDS SAID, IF YOU'RE GOING TO POUT AT 13–1, THEN YOU OUGHT TO QUIT. I HAD TO WAKE UP A LITTLE BIT AND GROW UP.

SI: *How did it come about that you were the one who announced McCoy's name at the NFL draft?*
MB: Commissioner [Roger] Goodell asked me to, and I thought it was a great idea. Colt said, 'Gosh, if you hadn't called my name, I don't know what I was going to do.' I brought his and Jordan Shipley's draft cards home for them.
SI: *When will you know that the time is right to step away from coaching?*
MB: When I'm not having fun, and if I'm not wanting to go and start recruiting immediately after a season. People think I know now. I do not. [My wife] Sally doesn't. [Head-coach-in-waiting] Will Muschamp does not. Will's young, and he's willing to wait to let me finish like I want to.

TEXAS
81
TEXAS
18

A STORY OF SIBLING SUCCESS

Whether stuffing offenses on the field or treating patients in Africa, one thing keeps these defensive leaders together: brotherly love BY ELIZABETH McGARR

WHEN LINEBACKER EMMANUEL ACHO CAME OFF THE BENCH IN THE SECOND quarter against Oklahoma State last Oct. 31, he recognized the Cowboys' formation and shift before the snap. "They had run that play [a sweep] while I was on the bench," says Emmanuel. "So I knew what was coming." So did his brother, Sam, a Longhorns starting defensive end. "I realized I wasn't going to be able to make the play," says Sam, "and I knew Emmanuel was behind me, so I just did what I could to hold the blocker off Emmanuel, and Emmanuel made a tackle for a loss."

It was a simple play in a game that the Longhorns went on to win 41–14, but it's the kind of teamwork that Sam (who wears number 81) and Emmanuel (18) display on a regular basis—on and off the field. The brothers, both graduates of St. Mark's, a small private school in Dallas, have played together since Sam, now a senior in the business honors program, was in second grade and Manny, a junior pursuing sports management, was in first. They live together in an off-campus apartment. "In practice, if there's a pass that he gets one hand on and doesn't get an interception, I'll tell him, 'Hey, man, pick that off next time,' " says Sam. "He'll do the same if I miss a sack. He'll say, 'C'mon, you gotta get that. You're trying to be an All-America, right?' "

Sam was an Academic All-America last season and led the team with 10 sacks and finished with 63 tackles (14 for loss). Now he's the most experienced member of the line and has embraced his role as a leader. "Sam has stepped up on defense as the spokesperson," says coach Mack Brown. "He is such a versatile player. He can play any of the four positions up front." Sam also forced two fumbles and recovered four. Manny, who will compete for a full-time job this year after starting twice in '09, forced three and recovered two. "We were trying to see who would get the most," says Sam. "Then it became a thing where we teamed up and challenged the rest of the defense [to catch up to us]."

The Achos are themselves accustomed to challenges, especially off the field. In June the brothers accompanied their father, Sonny, a psychologist, and mother, Christie, a nurse practitioner, to Sonny's hometown in Abia State, in southeastern Nigeria. For two decades the elder Achos have traveled there with a group of volunteer surgeons, dentists, nurses and optometrists through Living Hope Ministries, an organization that the Achos founded. Sam and Manny, on their fourth trip as volunteers, did everything from helping with crowd control to carrying patients—literally—from surgery to recovery.

EXTRA POINT SAM AND EMMANUEL BOTH **PUT THE SHOT AND THREW THE DISCUS** AT ST. MARK'S. SAM HOLDS SCHOOL RECORDS IN BOTH.

Manny (18) and Sam (81) team up on ballcarriers.

Sonny estimates the group treated more than 3,000 patients during the 10-day trip, including more than 600 children. "I see people crawling into our rooms because they have no legs or someone whose whole arm has been infected by a simple spider bite," says Emmanuel. "In the United States you take one antibiotic and you're cured. It really humbles me."

Shortly after the family returned to Texas, Sonny sat in the backseat of Sam's car, listening, as the brothers drove down to Austin to resume their off-season training program. His sons spoke about the trip, about music, about what to expect from the incoming freshmen and how to get back to the national title game. "I was just overjoyed," says Sonny. "They've developed a powerful relationship, and they're bringing the best out in each other." □

JIM COWSERT/ICON SMI (LEFT); DARREN CARROLL

TEXAS A&M AGGIES

The Aggies have the star quarterback and dominant defenders to win big this season—now it's time for them to step onto the national stage **BY ELIZABETH McGARR**

THE VITALS

COACH Mike Sherman (3rd year) 10–15 (5–11 in Big 12)
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR Mike Sherman
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR Tim DeRuyter
2009 RECORD 6–7 (3–5, 4th in Big 12 South)
FINAL AP RANK NR
RETURNING STARTERS Offense 8, Defense 9
WINS OVER THE LAST FIVE SEASONS 5, 9, 7, 4, 6
2009 RANKINGS Division I-A (Big 12)
RUSHING OFFENSE 30 (2)
PASSING OFFENSE 16 (5)
TOTAL OFFENSE 5 (2)
RUSHING DEFENSE 90 (11)
PASSING DEFENSE 106 (12)
TOTAL DEFENSE 105 (12)

IT STANDS TO REASON THAT A TEAM WITH A STARTING QUARTERBACK who accounts for 17.9 points per game (fourth most in the country) and passes for 275.3 yards per game (11th most) should have a winning season. Yet Texas A&M, with quarterback Jerrod Johnson (he of the above statistics), finished 6–7, ending the year with a 44–20 flop in the Independence Bowl. "Last season we put our defense in a bind because we didn't get first downs," says coach Mike Sherman. "We would turn [the ball] over and our defense would be exposed."

In the off-season the Aggies' coaching staff went about finding a solution.

Offensively, the plan is to extend drives by adding nuances like zone read plays and bubble passes to receivers. "We're working on ways to get easy plays as opposed to always dropping back five steps and scanning the field," says Johnson, now a senior. Defensively, the Aggies will switch to a 3–4 base package under new coordinator Tim DeRuyter. Sherman feels the configuration is well suited to the Big 12 because it allows for more speed on the field. "With the frequency of screens and draws and bubbles that [other teams] throw to their receivers, it gives us a chance to match up and chase those plays down," says Sherman.

DeRuyter's priorities are increasing takeaways and improving third-down conversion defense. Texas A&M was 10th in the conference in turnovers gained (22) and sixth in forcing fourth downs (37.5 %). "There are great offenses in this league, and if you don't stress them, they're going to score points," says DeRuyter, who spent the last three years in charge of the defense at Air Force. "We need to disguise some coverages and [apply] pressure on third downs."

Johnson is optimistic about the defensive changes after having experienced the challenge they provide firsthand at spring practice. "[The defense] gave us some trouble," says Johnson. "From an offensive standpoint it seems like they had 20 guys out there."

This season Texas A&M should succeed with the standard 11 on each side, provided the solutions stick. "We had a pretty well-oiled machine last year," says Johnson, "but we're hoping that polishing it up will make us win a couple more games."

BIG 12 2010 PREVIEW
BIG 12 SOUTH

THE BIG IF WILL AN EXPANDED OFFENSIVE REPERTOIRE HELP RECEIVER JEFF FULLER AND THE AGGIES MOVE THE CHAINS?

Fuller, a sophomore, leads A&M in receiving TDs (16).

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER
4 Stephen F. Austin
11 Louisiana Tech
18 Florida International
30 at Oklahoma State

OCTOBER
9 Arkansas (in Arlington, Texas)
16 Missouri
23 at Kansas
30 Texas Tech

NOVEMBER
6 Oklahoma
13 at Baylor
20 Nebraska
25 at Texas

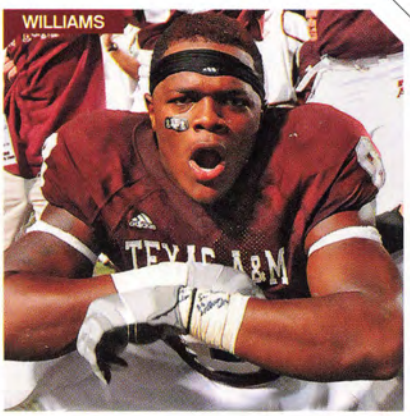
SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

The Aggies get another crack at Arkansas after losing 47–19 in '09. Big 12 title hopes hinge on the brutal late stretch versus OU, Nebraska and Texas.

RB Cyrus Gray steamrolled the Cyclones last October for 119 yards.

BRETT DAVIS/US PRESSWIRE (RIGHT); PATRICK GREEN/ICON SMI

TEXAS A&M
IOWA STATE
GRIMES



PROJECTED LINEUP

OFFENSE

QB	JERROD JOHNSON*	RYAN TANNEHILL
TB	CHRISTINE MICHAEL	CYRUS GRAY*
WR	JEFF FULLER*	BRANDAL JACKSON
WR	TERRENCE McCOY*	UZOMA NWACHUKWU
WR	RYAN SWOPE	KENRIC MCNEAL
TE	HUSTON PRIOLEAU	KENNY BROWN
LT	LUKE JOECKEL	JEFFREY HYDE
LG	EVAN EIKE*	BRIAN THOMAS
C	MATT ALLEN*	DANNY BAKER
RG	PATRICK LEWIS*	MATT ALLEN
RT	LEE GRIMES*	BRIAN THOMAS

DEFENSE

DE	SPENCER NEALY	STEPHEN BARRERA
DT	LUCAS PATTERSON*	EDDIE BROWN
DE	TONY JEROD-EDDIE*	KIRBY ENNIS
JOKER	VON MILLER*	JONATHAN STEWART
LB	GARRICK WILLIAMS*	AARON ARTERBURN
LB	SEAN PORTER	CHARLIE THOMAS
LB	MICHAEL HODGES*	KYLE MANGAN*
CB	TERRENCE FREDERICK*	CORYELL JUDIE
FS	STEVEN TERRELL	STEVEN CAMPBELL
SS	TRENT HUNTER*	COLTON VALENCIA
CB	DUSTIN HARRIS*	LIONEL SMITH

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	RANDY BULLOCK*	KYLE SERRES
P	RYAN EPPERSON*	KEN WOOD
PR	DUSTIN HARRIS*	TERRENCE FREDERICK
KR	CYRUS GRAY	RYAN SWOPE

**Returning starter*

TELLING NUMBER

6 YEARS SINCE A&M HAS HAD A 1,000-YARD RUSHER. COURTNEY LEWIS RUSHED FOR 1,024 YARDS IN 2003.

FROM LEFT: PATRICK GREEN/ICON SMI; WESLEY HITT/GETTY IMAGES; PATRICK GREEN/ICON SMI; DUSTIN BRADFORD/ICON SMI

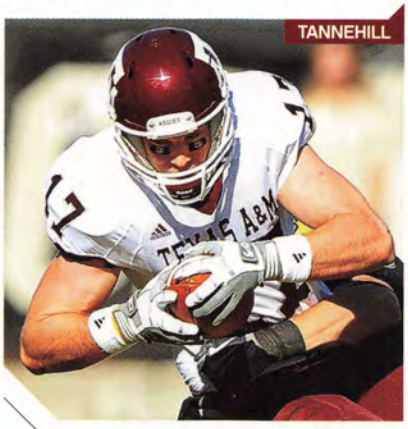
KEY RETURNEES

SS **TRENT HUNTER** JUNIOR
"He plays very fast and very physical, and because he understands the game, he can put himself in position to make a ton of plays," says defensive coordinator Tim DeRuyter of the 5' 10", 187-pound Hunter, who led the team in solo (58) and total tackles last year (95).

QB **JERROD JOHNSON** SENIOR
The 6' 5", 243-pound Johnson set eight school single-season records last season, including passing yardage (3,579) and passing touchdowns (30). He also rushed for 506 yards. Johnson had shoulder surgery in January but expects to be 100% by the opener.

TB **CHRISTINE MICHAEL** SOPHOMORE
Conference coaches named Michael the Big 12 Offensive Freshman of the Year after he led the team with 844 yards rushing and scored 10 TDs. The Aggies haven't had a 1,000-yard rusher since 2003, but the Beaumont native could reach that mark this season.

QB/WR **RYAN TANNEHILL** JUNIOR
Second on the team with 609 yards receiving last season, the versatile Tannehill also backed up Johnson, seeing time at quarterback in two games.



BREAKOUT PLAYER

WR **RYAN SWOPE** SOPHOMORE
Earned all-state as an RB for Westlake (Texas) High

The 6-foot, 202-pound slot receiver surged late in the 2009 season, catching 10 passes for 108 yards over the last four regular-season games. Coach Sherman expects Swope to become a "big-time" playmaker this season.

TOP RECRUIT

LT **LUKE JOECKEL** FRESHMAN
Dominant lineman will have an immediate impact

Luke and his twin brother, Matt, a quarterback, enrolled early and participated in spring drills. Sherman was impressed with Luke in particular—and not only by his size (6' 6", 280 pounds). "He doesn't get overwhelmed by anything," says the coach. Going into the fall, Luke is listed as the starting left tackle; his brother will probably be the third-string QB.

COACH'S Q&A

MIKE SHERMAN

ON LEARNING FROM SOLDIERS AND HIS TEAM'S GROWTH

SI: *You've coached at A&M in each of the last three decades. What are the biggest changes you've seen in the area?*
MS: There are a lot more restaurants in College Station. It's tough to get a seat on a Friday or a Saturday in this town.

SI: IN MAY YOU VISITED U.S. TROOPS IN IRAQ. WHAT STANDS OUT FROM THE TRIP?

MS: I FLEW OVER FOR ONE WEEK, AND I LEFT FIVE KIDS AND A WIFE AT HOME. [THE SOLDIERS] ARE DOING THIS FOR MONTHS AND YEARS AT A TIME. THAT STRUCK ME: THESE PEOPLE LEAVE THEIR FAMILIES AT HOME FOR A LONG TIME.

SI: *What did you learn over there?*
MS: I spoke to [several generals] about teamwork and how they drill their soldiers.
SI: *Did you find time to meet Aggies soldiers?*
MS: Yes. I brought a DVD of the spring game, and [a group of us] watched it. The soldiers look forward to football season. They watch the game on the computer or listen to it at three in the morning, [and] it takes their minds off the current state of affairs.
SI: *Speaking of the upcoming season, how will the team be different in 2010?*
MS: Last year we played 18 true freshman. With [new defensive coordinator Tim DeRuyter] coming in and the natural maturation of our team, we'll be better.

AGGIES
adidas
TEXAS A&M
40
A M

ALL HAIL THE KING OF COLLEGE STATION

When sack artist Von Miller announced his decision to stay at Texas A&M, a shot at a Big 12 South title became a real possibility BY ELIZABETH McGARR

"IF YOU'RE THE KING, YOU DON'T LEAVE YOUR PEOPLE," SAYS LINEBACKER VON Miller, who comes across as the anti–LeBron James when asked about his decision to return to Texas A&M for his senior year instead of declaring for the NFL draft. While the comparison may be hyperbolic, Aggieland certainly heaved a collective sigh of relief when the nation's sack leader declared his loyalty to A&M on Jan. 13.

It took three years for Miller, who was raised in the Dallas area, to become the type of player whose presence could make or break a season. He played in nine games at defensive end his freshman year, making 22 tackles, and started four games at outside linebacker as a sophomore and had 3½ sacks. Last summer coach Mike Sherman made some adjustments. "I knew [Miller] was a talented athlete," says Sherman, who even considered turning the 6' 3" 240-pounder into a tight end or a fullback. "Last year we said, Instead of trying to find the right spot for him, let's try to make our defense work so our best player can have some success."

The coaches created a hybrid of linebacker and defensive end called the "jack" position for Miller, which allowed him to use his speed and power to get at quarterbacks. The result? Miller led the nation in sacks, with 17. This season new defensive coordinator Tim DeRuyter has decided to install a 3–4 defense and play Miller in the new "joker" position. In the scheme Miller will line up at outside linebacker, but—unlike last year—he will have the freedom to also drop back into coverage.

"Last year I was just a stand-up defensive end," explains Miller. "Now hopefully I can catch some picks." And of course he'll still rush the passer. "Coach Sherman would probably fire me if we drop him into coverage too much and take away his sacks," says DeRuyter.

Following his breakout season Miller thought seriously about taking his pass-rushing skills to the NFL. Last winter he spoke at length with Sherman and his father, Von Sr., who stressed that he needed a plan for L.A.F., or life after football. "Coaching is my plan B, but my plan A is to start up some chicken farms," says Miller, a university studies major who is minoring in poultry science and sports management. "[I want to] open up Miller Farms in East Texas."

Also in favor of Miller's return to school was his mother, Gloria, who had jump-started his football career in fourth grade. She had enrolled Von and his little brother, Vince, in a youth league near their home in DeSoto, Texas, unbeknownst to the elder Von, who had wanted them to wait at least until junior high to play contact football. "I just kept the helmets and the pads in the back of my suburban," says Gloria, who parked in the garage and was able to get away with it for nearly an entire season before her husband, who parked in front of the house, found out. In making his decision, Miller thought about his teammates, especially the fellow DeSoto natives—defensive lineman Tony Jerod-Eddie, linebacker Garrick Williams and running back Cyrus Gray—with whom he has played since fifth grade.

Finally, he considered the A&M faithful. "I thought about all those Aggies out there in Aggieland," says Miller. "This is our year to bring it back home. For me to walk out on that, I don't think I could have forgiven myself, and I don't think they could have forgiven me either." □

EXTRA POINT IN '09, MILLER WAS A FINALIST FOR TOP COLLEGIATE DEFENSIVE END AND A SEMIFINALIST FOR LINEBACKER OF THE YEAR.

Miller led the nation with 1.31 sacks per game.

BRETT DAVIS/US PRESSWIRE (LEFT); JACK DEMPSEY/AP

TEXAS TECH RED RAIDERS

With a new sheriff in town—Tommy Tuberville in place of Mike Leach—changes are coming to that manic passing attack. And to the defense **BY ELIZABETH McGARR**

THE VITALS

COACH Tommy Tuberville (1st year)
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR Neal Brown
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR James Willis
2009 RECORD 9–4 (5-3, T-3 in Big 12 South)
FINAL AP RANK 21
RETURNING STARTERS Offense 6, Defense 6
WINS OVER THE LAST FIVE SEASONS 9, 8, 9, 11, 9
2009 RANKINGS Division I-A (Big 12)
RUSHING OFFENSE 115 (12)
PASSING OFFENSE 2 (1)
TOTAL OFFENSE 4 (1)
RUSHING DEFENSE 38 (7)
PASSING DEFENSE 73 (5)
TOTAL DEFENSE 49 (6)

ONE IS ALMOST TEMPTED TO ASK TOMMY TUBERVILLE TO REpeat what he said. "We're going to start throwing to set up the run." Yup, you heard right. Texas Tech, deployers of the wildest air attack in the West under former coach Mike Leach, will be setting up to move the ball on the ground.

"We won't be a power running team," Tuberville goes on to explain. "We'll have a finesse running game, where we'll [also] use the running backs [for] screen passes, short passes to help the quarterback." O.K., this sounds more plausible, given that Tech ranked 115th in the NCAA in rushing offense last season, hasn't had a 1,000-yard rusher since 1998.

Fans in Lubbock will still recognize the offense; the team was second in the country in passing yards, after all, and Tuberville will use the personnel he has. "We want to make sure we cover all bases throwing the football, not change a lot, but put our touch on it," says Tuberville, fresh off a yearlong coaching hiatus after having spent 10 seasons—including a perfect 2004—at Auburn.

BIG 12 2010 PREVIEW
BIG 12 SOUTH

THE BIG IF CAN NOSETACKLE COLBY WHITLOCK **HANDLE HIS HEIGHTENED RESPONSIBILITIES** IN THE NEW 3-4 DEFENSE?

Whitlock's pressure helped dominate North Dakota.

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER
5 SMU
11 AT NEW MEXICO
18 TEXAS

OCTOBER
2 AT IOWA STATE
9 BAYLOR (in Dallas)
16 OKLAHOMA STATE
23 AT COLORADO
30 AT TEXAS A&M

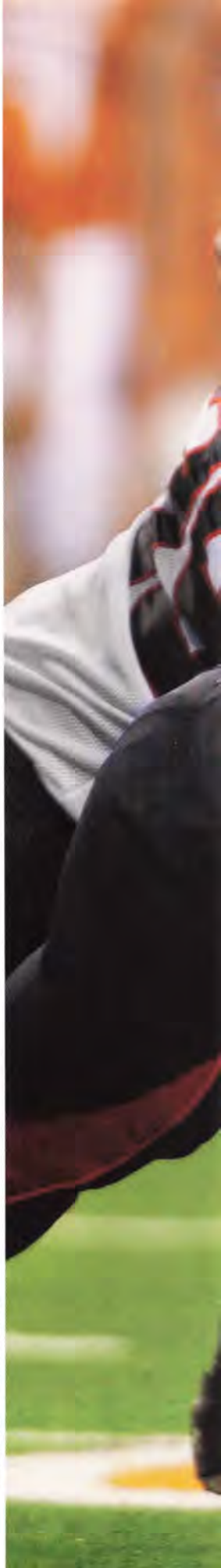
NOVEMBER
6 MISSOURI
13 AT OKLAHOMA
20 WEBER STATE
27 HOUSTON

SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

Texas in prime time recalls Tech's 39–33 upset of the Longhorns in '08. Winning in Norman won't be as easy as last season's 41–13 trouncing of OU at home.

While transitioning from a 4–3 to a modified 3–4 defense that will rely heavily on the play of speedy senior rushers Brian Duncan and Julius Howard, Tuberville will also incorporate what he calls the NASCAR offense, his version of the hurry-up that the team will use 20% to 30% of the time. The question: Which quarterback will Tuberville choose to execute it? Both senior front-runners missed nearly all of spring practice with injuries: Taylor Potts (who started 10 games in 2009) cut his right throwing hand, and Steven Sheffield (whose late-game heroics filling in for Potts won the Alamo Bowl) broke a bone in his left foot. "I'm looking for both of these guys to step up and take leadership of the team," says their coach. "Whoever does that the best will probably be the starter."

Leach's tenure came to an abrupt and turbulent end—he was fired after questions arose about his alleged mistreatment of a player, something he strongly denies—but it seems Tuberville restored order in the spring, even while making his alterations. "Sometimes when you have change, you have guys who don't accept it or don't grasp it that fast," says Tuberville. "We never missed a lick."



In his third start safety Cody Davis (16) had nine tackles against Texas.

ERIC GAYIAP (RIGHT); KARL ANDERSON/ICON SMI

WILLIAMS
16
8

POTTS

PROJECTED LINEUP

OFFENSE

QB	TAYLOR POTTS*	STEVEN SHEFFIELD
RB	BARON BATCH*	ERIC STEPHENS
WR	LYLE LEONG	ERIC WARD
WR	TRAMAIN SWINDALL*	CORNELIUS DOUGLAS
WR	DETRON LEWIS*	AUSTIN ZOUZALIK
WR	ALEX TORRES*	JACOBY FRANKS
LT	TERRY MCDANIEL	MICKEY OKAFOR
LG	LONNIE EDWARDS*	BLAKE EMERT
C	JUSTIN KEOWN	CHRIS OLSON
RG	DEVERIC GALLINGTON	KYLE CLARK
RT	LAADRIAN WADDLE	BEAU CARPENTER

DEFENSE

DE	KERRY HYDER	CHRISTOPHER KNIGHTON
NT	COLBY WHITLOCK*	BRITTON BARBEE
DT	MYLES WADE	DONALD LANGLEY
DE/LB	BRIAN DUNCAN*	AUNDREY BARR
LB	SAM FEHOKO	BRANDON MAHONEY
LB	BRONT BIRD*	TYRONE SONIER
LB	JULIUS HOWARD	DANIEL COBB
CB	JARVIS PHILLIPS	D.J. JOHNSON
S	CODY DAVIS*	BRETT DEWHURST
S	FRANKLIN MITCHEM*	TERRANCE BULLITT
CB	WILL FORD	LARON MOORE*

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	MATT WILLIAMS	BRADLEY HICKS
P	RYAN ERXLEBEN	JONATHAN LACOUR
KR	ERIC STEPHENS*	
PR	AUSTIN ZOUZALIK*	

**Returning starter*

TELLING NUMBER

136 RED RAIDERS TD PASSES OVER THE PAST THREE SEASONS, 15 MORE THAN THE NEXT-BEST DIVISION I-A TEAM, TULSA, DURING THAT SPAN.

FROM LEFT: KARL ANDERSON/ICON SMI; STEVEN LEIJA/SOUTHCREEK GLOBAL; PATRICK GREEN/ ICON SMI; GEOFFREY MCALLISTER/LUBBOCK AVALANCHE-JOURNAL/AP

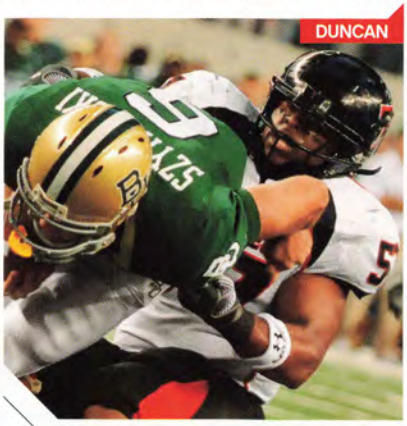
KEY RETURNEES

S **CODY DAVIS** SOPHOMORE
Named a Freshman All-America after his redshirt season, the 6' 2" 200-pounder's 81 tackles were second among Red Raiders last season.

WR **DETRON LEWIS** SENIOR
He paced all Tech receivers with 844 yards in 2009, averaging 13.0 yards a catch and scoring the go-ahead TD to cap a 10-catch performance in the Alamo Bowl win over Michigan State. The 6-foot Lewis will once again be a key inside target.

NT **COLBY WHITLOCK** SENIOR
Statistics (six sacks over three seasons) don't tell the real story when it comes to the consistent Whitlock. New defensive coordinator James Willis has installed a 3-4 defense, and the 6' 2", 287-pound Whitlock is expected to be the anchor.

DE/LB **BRIAN DUNCAN** SENIOR
The coaches have converted the 6' 1", 240-pound Duncan, a two-year starter at middle linebacker, into a stand-up, pass-rushing hybrid end-linebacker in the new 3-4 alignment. His 88 tackles (including a career-high 15 against Houston) led the team last year.


DUNCAN

BREAKOUT PLAYER

CB **WILL FORD** SOPHOMORE
Successful switch in the secondary

A safety since his sophomore year at Cooper High in Abilene, Texas, Ford competed for and won a starting spot in the Tech defensive backfield—at right corner. "He's a physical guy who can play a lot of man coverage and can play zone coverage," says Tuberville. "He really had a good spring."

TOP RECRUIT

DE **SCOTT SMITH** JUNIOR
A newcomer who can change a game

Ranked as the No. 4 juco prospect in this year's class by Rivals.com, the transfer from Kansas's Butler County C.C. should soon be a contributor. And at 6' 7" and 275 pounds Smith can do damage: He had 14 sacks, four fumble recoveries and 26½ tackles for loss in 2009.

COACH'S Q&A

TOMMY TUBERVILLE

ON HIS COACHING HIATUS, THE MEDIA AND HIS MOM

SI: *What has been the most unexpected thing about your transition to Lubbock?*
TT: The wind blows. That was new to me. In spring practice every day the wind blew 40 or 50 miles an hour. It was an adjustment.
SI: *And your mother, Olive, moved to town with you?*
TT: She's followed me everywhere. She's 82, and she almost beat me out here, moving. I've got two boys, in the eighth and the 11th grades. She bought a house next to their schools so she could walk to [their] basketball and football games.
SI: *Has she always been such a sports mom?*
TT: She loves to go to games. She sat in the bleachers watching me and my sister and brother, and she does it with the grandkids.

SI: HOW DO YOU STAY ACTIVE?

TT: I WORK OUT EVERY DAY, I LIKE TO RUN, AND I'M AN AVID GOLFER. WITH THE STRESS IN OUR BUSINESS, YOU HAVE TO DO SOME KIND OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY EVERY DAY OR YOU'LL GO NUTS.

SI: *What was the most interesting part of your year away from coaching?*
TT: Being in the media. I spent some time [working on-air] for ESPN and ESPNU, and it was a lot of fun, but I figured out pretty quickly how time consuming it is. You have to be familiar with everybody, not just [the players and coaches] in your region.

TEXAS TECH
XII
55

THE BACK WHO CAME BACK, BETTER

His career nearly ruined by injury, a revived runner is thankful for his second chance, and he's using it to prove the skeptics wrong BY ELIZABETH McGARR

THE WORDS STUNG. "I FIGURED YOU WOULDN'T MAKE IT," THE STRANGER said to him. "I didn't think you had what it took." Baron Batch recalls hearing that at a tailgate outside Jones AT&T Stadium in 2007. "He was thinking that I had either quit or gotten kicked off the team," Batch says. "That's one of the things that really humbled me. Just knowing that it can all be over in the blink of an eye."

Batch's football career was not over that fall day, but it seemed as if it just as well might have been. The West Texas native had played six games for the Red Raiders as a true freshman running back in 2006 before tearing ligaments in his left ankle in practice. A year and seven surgeries later, he was still a member of the program but had been granted a medical redshirt and was on the scout team. "For about a year and a half," says Batch, "I'd wake up in the morning, my ankle would hurt."

While he was laid up, Batch received some much-needed support from a couple of surprising sources. Keyunta Dawson and Manny Ramirez, then seniors and standouts on the team, came to visit Batch at the hospital after that seventh surgery. "He was really down," says Dawson, now a defensive end with the Indianapolis Colts. "You could see it on his face."

Dawson and Ramirez's gesture, and their subsequent efforts, meant a lot to Batch, who remains friends with both of them. "They gave me some encouragement and started inviting me to go to church and to Bible study with them, and they prayed for me," Batch says. "That was the starting point of me changing."

The rest of the transformation took some time. Batch toiled in anonymity on the practice squad in 2007. Then the following fall he finally looked like the running back who had rushed for 2,005 yards as a senior at Midland High.

At 5' 11" and 205 pounds, Batch wasn't bowling over Big 12 defenders, but he gained 754 yards on 111 carries in 2008. Then he ran for 884 on 168 carries last season in Mike Leach's offense, which didn't dictate many handoffs to running backs. Batch is the first to admit that while the lack of carries was frustrating at first, he has become a more complete back because he has been used in different ways. His 57 receptions were third on the team last year. "He's physical enough to grind between the tackles, and he has the speed to turn the edge and go the distance," says Red Raiders running backs coach Chad Scott. "He also has great hands out of the backfield and does a great job in pass protection."

EXTRA POINT IN HIS FINAL TWO SEASONS AT MIDLAND HIGH, BATCH RUSHED FOR 2,800 YARDS AND SCORED 43 TOUCHDOWNS.

Batch rushed for 14 touchdowns last season.

Scott wants to see Batch, who had minor surgery to repair a sports hernia in April but will be ready to go well before Texas Tech's season opener, accelerate through holes with more confidence and consistency. "The biggest thing is just getting him to trust his ability, trust his speed," says Scott. "He's a great running back. He doesn't need to know that right now, but I think he's one of the better running backs in the Big 12."

Batch isn't the type to get a big head over praise like that anyway. After all, he's seen the other side of success. "Every time I'm out there, I know that I probably shouldn't be," says Batch. "I always think about that. Why me? A lot of people have their careers cut short over stuff like this. I've been lucky enough to get back." □

MANNY FLORES/CSM (LEFT); STEVEN LEIJA/SOUTHCREEK GLOBAL

Kansas and running back Toben Opurum pushed past Iowa State with a 41–36 win last year. Opurum and Cyclones cornerback Ter'ran Benton could grapple again on Oct. 30.

BIG 12 NORTH

JAMIE SQUIRE/GETTY IMAGES

COLORADO BUFFALOES

56 Can they throw the ball well enough to win?

59 Coach Dan Hawkins is undaunted by the past

60 Nate Solder blossoms on the blind side

IOWA STATE CYCLONES

62 Fresh off success but facing a killer schedule

65 Paul Rhoads can't curb his enthusiasm

66 Native son Austen Arnaud feels ready to lead

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90 Tackle Jared Crick is the next big Suh

COLORADO BUFFALOES

It's crunch time: With an unreliable passing situation and just two years left in the Big 12, the Buffs have more than the program's dignity on the line **BY GARY GRAMLING**

THE VITALS

COACH Dan Hawkins (5th year) 16–33 (10–22 in Big 12)
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR Eric Kiesau
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR Ron Collins
2009 RECORD 3–9 (2–6, 5th in Big 12 North)
FINAL AP RANK NR
RETURNING STARTERS Offense 8, Defense 7
WINS OVER THE LAST FIVE SEASONS 7, 2, 6, 5, 3
2009 RANKING Division I-A (Big 12)
RUSHING OFFENSE 113 (11)
PASSING OFFENSE 45 (8)
TOTAL OFFENSE 104 (12)
RUSHING DEFENSE 80 (9)
PASSING DEFENSE 35 (4)
TOTAL DEFENSE 57 (7)

DAN HAWKINS ARRIVED IN 2006 AS A HERALDED HIRE WITH A 53–11 record from Boise State. Now, entering year five of the coach's tenure in Boulder, things haven't gone as planned: four straight losing seasons and no better than a third-place finish in the Big 12's weak North Division.

Colorado's Achilles' heel is under center. Its passing offense has been mediocre the past two years; in 2009 the Buffaloes were 111th out of 120 Division I-A teams in passer rating (106.1), and only three schools threw more interceptions than their 18. Athletic junior Tyler Hansen heads into the fall better prepared to lead Colorado's spread offense than the coach's son, Cody Hawkins, who took plenty of heat starting for parts of three seasons. Hawkins's strengths in accuracy and poise have been shaken behind a struggling offensive line that was better served by Hansen's ability to improvise.

Fortunately for whoever will be quarterback, that young O-line returns older and wiser, led by Lombardi Award candidate Nate Solder

BIG 12 2010 PREVIEW
BIG 12 NORTH

THE BIG IF QUARTERBACK PLAY WILL BE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A BOWL BERTH AND **A POSSIBLE VACANCY IN THE COACHING STAFF.**

Hansen passed for 1,440 yards and eight TDs in '09.

at left tackle. Diminutive tailback Rodney Stewart, who took over as starter in Week 3 last year, should get help from redshirt freshman Quentin Hildreth. And senior receiver Scotty McKnight provides a security blanket in the passing game, although the Buffaloes need a deep threat to emerge—Toney Clemons, a Michigan transfer with size, speed and a bit of an edge, has what it takes to fill that role.

The defense was inconsistent last year, but defensive end Marquez Herrod and cornerbacks Jalil Brown and Jimmy Smith could have All-Big 12–worthy seasons. B.J. Beatty is the only returning starter in the linebacking corps, but there's enough raw talent, including physical thumper Michael Sipili, for cautious optimism.

Overall 16 Buffs starters return from last year's squad, which despite going a woeful 0–6 away from Folsom Field played better late in the season, including a near upset of No. 12 Oklahoma State in their road finale. Colorado also has to clean up its penalties—it was the nation's third-most penalized team last year, drawing nearly nine flags per game—if it wants to play in its first bowl game since 2007. Failure could spell the end of the Hawkins era in Boulder.

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER
4 COLORADO STATE (in Denver)
11 AT CAL
18 HAWAII

OCTOBER
2 GEORGIA
9 AT MISSOURI
16 BAYLOR
23 TEXAS TECH
30 AT OKLAHOMA

NOVEMBER
6 AT KANSAS
13 IOWA STATE
20 KANSAS STATE
26 AT NEBRASKA

SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

Colorado State is the Buffs' best shot at snapping their 12 road-game losing streak—half the seats in Denver will be filled by CU fans.

McKnight's TD catches against Nebraska were two of his season's six.

RON CHENOY/US PRESSWIRE (2)

21
28

BIG12REPORT
THE BUFFALOES BIG 12 NORTH

PROJECTED LINEUP

OFFENSE

QB	TYLER HANSEN*	CODY HAWKINS
TB	RODNEY STEWART*	QUENTIN HILDRETH
WR	WILL JEFFERSON	ANDRE SIMMONS
WR	TONEY CLEMONS	KYLE CEFALO
WR	SCOTTY MCKNIGHT*	JASON ESPINOZA
TE	RYAN DEEHAN	LUKE WALTERS
LT	NATE SOLDER*	DAVID BAKHTIARI
LG	ETHAN ADKINS*	BLAKE BEHRENS
C	KEENAN STEVENS*	MIKE ILTIS
RG	RYAN MILLER*	SHAWN DANIELS
RT	BRYCE GIVENS*	RYAN DANNEWITZ

DEFENSE

DE	FORREST WEST	JOSH HARTIGAN
DT	WILL PERICAK*	CONRAD OBI
DT	CURTIS CUNNINGHAM*	EUGENE GOREE
DE	MARQUEZ HERROD*	NICK KASA
LB	MICHAEL SIPILI	DERRICK WEBB
LB	JON MAJOR	PATRICK MAHNKE
LB	B.J. BEATTY*	TYLER AHLES
CB	JALIL BROWN*	DEJI OLATOYE
SS	ANTHONY PERKINS*	VINCE EWING
FS	RAY POLK	ARTHUR JAFFEE
CB	JIMMY SMITH*	PAUL VIGO

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	ARIC GOODMAN*	ZACH GROSSNICKLE
P	ZACH GROSSNICKLE	ARIC GOODMAN
KR	JASON ESPINOZA	QUENTIN HILDRETH
PR	TONEY CLEMONS	ARTHUR JAFFEE

**Returning starter*

TELLING NUMBER

45 DIVISION I-A RUNNING BACKS WITH MORE NET RUSHING YARDS LAST SEASON THAN THE 1,055 BY THE BUFFALOES AS A TEAM.

FROM LEFT: JACK DEMPSEY/AP; SCOTT TERNA/CSM; MARC PISCOTTY/ICON SMI; BRIAN BAHR/GETTY IMAGES

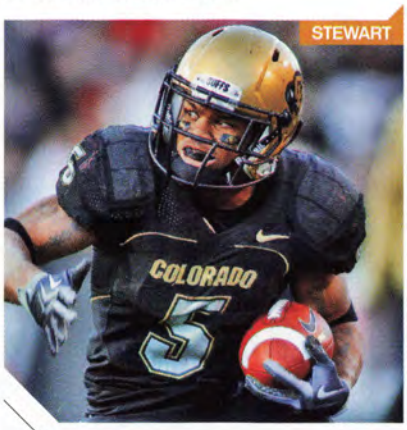
KEY RETURNEES

CB **JALIL BROWN** SENIOR
The physical corner with good cover skills defended 15 passes last season, more than any other conference player returning this fall. He'll be tested against three of the country's best receivers—Cal's Marvin Jones, Hawaii's Greg Salas and Georgia's A.J. Green.

DE **MARQUEZ HERROD** SENIOR
The 280-pounder anchors the run defense, and his three-sack performance against Kansas last October shows he can disrupt a passing attack as well.

WR **SCOTTY MCKNIGHT** SENIOR
McKnight, who had 76 catches last season, has been the lone bright spot in Colorado's maddeningly inconsistent passing situation. With the Buffaloes still searching for another deep threat, McKnight will be their go-to guy again.

TB **RODNEY STEWART** JUNIOR
Last year the surprise starter proved he could carry a bigger load than his size (5' 6", 175 pounds) suggests, compiling five 100-yard rushing games and leading the Buffs with nine touchdowns.



STEWART

BREAKOUT PLAYER

LB **MICHAEL SIPILI** SENIOR
Finally getting his chance to start

Other than quarterback, middle linebacker is the biggest question mark on the roster. After seeing spot duty last year, Sipili is set to step into the role full-time. He has enough range to be a force in the middle of the field; among his career highlights was a six-tackle, 1½ tackles for loss performance at Texas last October. Look for him to emerge as an All–Big 12 candidate.

TOP RECRUIT

WR **TONEY CLEMONS** JUNIOR
Welcoming a critical new weapon

The passing game is in dire need of a playmaker, and that might be this Michigan transfer whom CU coach Dan Hawkins has praised as the team's most exciting receiver. Clemons is 6' 2" with 4.3 speed, a recipe for a potent downfield threat.

COACH'S Q&A

DAN HAWKINS

ON COACHING IN THE MAJORS AND SIGNING HIS SON

SI: *You're coming off four losing seasons. Is there a sense of urgency with this team?*
DH: I don't think so. Every season you're starting from scratch. The good news is I think we're going to be pretty solid across the board. But the bad news is I don't think there's one bad team in the Big 12.

SI: WHAT'S THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COACHING IN A MID-MAJOR [HAWKINS COACHED BOISE STATE FROM 2001 TO '05] AND IN A BCS CONFERENCE?

DH: YOU'RE DEALING WITH, WEEK IN AND WEEK OUT, TOP-OF-THE-LINE PLAYERS, COACHES AND STADIUMS. THE MARGIN OF ERROR IS SMALLER, BUT THAT'S PART OF THE CHALLENGE. IF YOU'RE GOING TO RIDE A BIKE, YOU WANT TO RIDE THE TOUR DE FRANCE ONE DAY.

SI: *You've been on both sides of the BCS controversy. What's your take?*
DH: I don't think anybody should just be excluded from the process. Teams like Boise State and TCU have proved that.
SI: *Your son Cody was heavily recruited. What was it like trying to sign him?*
DH: People thought, He's going to play for his dad. When Cody decided to come here, I had no idea. His letter of intent came in on the fax machine, and I was like, All right!

BUFFS
COLORADO
78

BUFFALOES' SOLDER, TOP OF THE CHARTS

Once a super-sized receiver skeptical about a position shift, this hard worker is now the fittest, fastest offensive lineman you'll ever meet BY GARY GRAMLING

WHEN HE CAME TO BOULDER, IN 2006, NATE SOLDER WAS A LIGHTLY REGARDED 6' 8", 240-pound tight end prospect. This year, 60 pounds and one position change later, he could leave campus as the best offensive lineman in college football. ¶ After the 2007 season coach Dan Hawkins and his staff approached Solder, who had three catches as a redshirt freshman, about making the switch to offensive tackle. "You could be a good tight end, but you could be a great tackle," Hawkins told him.

Solder was on board, but there was some reluctance. He had always been unusually athletic for his height, and the new position would require him to pack on 50 pounds. "People always think of linemen as the fat, slow, unathletic guys, and that's kind of the way I felt about it," he says. "I felt I was an athlete."

Determined to maintain his agility, he delved into the world of nutrition and read up on effective ways to add lean muscle, avoiding sugars and fatty foods and practically living in the weight room. Solder's enthusiasm for his new assignment grew as he discovered firsthand the athleticism required to kick-slide, trap and pull. By the following season the now 6' 9" Solder had bulked up to 300 pounds but, astonishingly, kept his body fat below 10%, helping preserve a 40 time in the 4.85 range, elite for linemen. The Buffaloes had their new left tackle.

They promptly threw the sophomore into the fire, where Solder more than held his own while playing every snap on the blind side. With the exception of a shaky day against Texas's ferocious pass-rushing linebacker Brian Orakpo, Solder was a lights-out pass protector who allowed just one sack on the year and a road-grating run blocker, leading the team with 69 knockdown blocks.

He was even better in 2009, grading out to 90% or more in 10 games en route to becoming the only Buffalo selected to the All–Big 12 first team. In preparation for his final season Solder has gotten his body fat down to 6.5%, an almost unthinkable proportion for a 300-pounder.

Solder's success reminds Hawkins of another unheralded prospect turned blind-side star he once coached at Boise State: Ryan Clady, the Denver Broncos' All-Pro left tackle, who made the switch from defensive tackle in 2004.

"In terms of athleticism they're very close. Nate is faster than Ryan. Ryan carried a little bit more weight down toward the end [of his college career]. He was a little more physical," says Hawkins, who thinks Solder could—and hopes will—put on another 20 pounds without much trouble.

EXTRA POINT THE MULTITALENTED SOLDER **EARNED ALL-STATE HONORS FOR PAINTING AND SCULPTURE** AT BUENA VISTA (COLO.) HIGH.

Solder may lose his helmet but never his head.

Solder's work off the field has been equally impressive. A three-time Academic All–Big 12 first-teamer, he has a 3.45 GPA as a biology major. He plans on getting a master's degree when his football career is over, with an eye toward veterinary school or working with politicians on environmental issues. But grad school may have to wait—there's a good chance Solder will become Colorado's first first-round pick since Tyler Brayton in 2003.

"You're not going to find a harder worker or a smarter guy," says Hawkins. "You want him to work for you, you want him to be your left tackle, you want him to marry your daughter. He's a special guy." □

PATRICK GREEN/ICON SMI (2)

IOWA STATE CYCLONES

Last season's thrills brought a fresh breeze through Ames. Now the hard part: rebuilding the defense while riding out the hardest schedule in the country **BY RICHARD DEITSCH**

THE VITALS

COACH Paul Rhoads (2nd year) 7–6 (3–5 in Big 12)
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR Tom Herman
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR Wally Burnham
2009 RECORD 7–6 (3–5, 4th in Big 12 North)
FINAL AP RANK NR
RETURNING STARTERS Offense 5, Defense 5
WINS OVER THE LAST FIVE SEASONS 7, 4, 3, 2, 7
2009 RANKINGS Division I-A (Big 12)
RUSHING OFFENSE 35 (3)
PASSING OFFENSE 94 (9)
TOTAL OFFENSE 73 (8)
RUSHING DEFENSE 86 (10)
PASSING DEFENSE 102 (10)
TOTAL DEFENSE 99 (11)

SURE, THE INSIGHT BOWL LACKS THE TRADITION AND PAGEANTRY of the Rose and the Sugar bowls, but don't tell the supporters of Iowa State football. The team's 14–13 win over Minnesota capped one of the more remarkable turnaround seasons in recent college football history, as the Cyclones finished 2009 with a 7–6 record after having lost their final 10 games the year before.

Iowa State enters 2010 with plenty of momentum—coach Paul Rhoads pulled in the school's highest-rated recruiting class since '02—but with arguably the most difficult schedule in the nation, it's going to be tough to repeat the bowl feat. Rhoads admits his team will likely win fewer games despite having more talent than last year.

Dual-threat quarterback Austen Arnaud and speedy but underrated running back Alexander Robinson are the focal points of the spread offense, though Arnaud must improve on a shaky 2009 in which his numbers fell across the board—one fewer touchdown, three more picks and a completion rate that dropped from 61.6% to 58.7%.

BIG 12 2010 PREVIEW
BIG 12 NORTH

THE BIG IF CAN THE "YOUNG AND INEXPERIENCED" D, INCLUDING LINEBACKER KLEIN, MATURE ENOUGH TO KEEP IOWA STATE CLOSE?

Klein has played in nine games and made 17 tackles.

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER
2 NORTHERN ILLINOIS
11 AT IOWA
18 KANSAS STATE (in Kansas City, Mo.)
25 NORTHERN IOWA

OCTOBER
2 TEXAS TECH
9 UTAH
16 AT OKLAHOMA
23 AT TEXAS
30 KANSAS

NOVEMBER
6 NEBRASKA
13 AT COLORADO
20 MISSOURI

SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

A killer. A nonconference battle at Iowa, back-to-back games at Oklahoma and at Texas—analyst Phil Steele says it's the nation's toughest slate.

But the defense is the real worry. The Cyclones lost five linebackers, including all three starters, and two starting defensive linemen from a unit that was already ranked 99th in total defense last season.

"We are young and inexperienced—that's a bad combination, right?" says Rhoads jokingly.

He hopes sophomores A.J. Klein and Jake Knott, and juco transfer Matt Tau'fo'ou—all likely starting linebackers—grow up fast. The D-line's lack of size and strength is a big concern. Only the secondary seems solid, led by junior cornerback Leonard Johnson and senior strong safety David Sims.

Given the rigorous schedule and the lost defensive personnel, most observers are picking Iowa State to finish low in the Big 12 North. But Arnaud says that's what he's come to expect every year as a Cyclone. "The college football magazines come out and give us a shot at three wins at the most," he says. "But we embrace that. Iowa State has had the workers' mentality ever since I've been here. We're going to come every day with hard hats and lunch pails and go to work. We know we have tough teams on the schedule, but I think that will make us better."

A threat as a runner and a receiver, Robinson scored nine TDs in 2009.

PETER AIKEN/CSM (RIGHT); DAVID PURDY/CSM

STATE
NIKE
33

L. JOHNSON

PROJECTED LINEUP

OFFENSE

QB	AUSTEN ARNAUD*	JEROME TILLER
RB	ALEXANDER ROBINSON*	JEFF WOODY
WR	SEDRICK JOHNSON	DARIUS REYNOLDS
WR	JAKE WILLIAMS	KEITH BLANTON
WR	DARIUS DARKS*	JOSH LENZ
TE	COLIN FRANKLIN	KURT HAMMERSCHMIDT
LT	KELECHI OSEMELE	KYLE LICHTENBERG
LG	ALEX ALVAREZ*	JON CASPERS
C	BEN LAMAAK*	SEAN SMITH
RG	SCOTT HAUGHTON	DREW DAVIS
RT	BRAYDEN BURRIS	ZACK SPEARS

DEFENSE

DE	PATRICK NEAL*	CLEYON LAING
DT	JAKE MCDONOUGH	AUSTIN ALBURTIS
NG	BAILEY JOHNSON*	STEPHEN RUEMPOLHAMER
DE	RASHAWN PARKER*	ROOSEVELT MAGGITT
LB	A.J. KLEIN	JACOB LATTIMER
LB	MATT TAU'FO'OU	PRESTON KAUFMAN
LB	JAKE KNOTT	KEVIN HAMLIN
CB	TER'RAN BENTON	JEREMY REEVES
SS	DAVID SIMS*	ZAC SANDVIG
FS	MICHAEL O'CONNELL	EARL BROOKS
CB	LEONARD JOHNSON*	ANTHONY YOUNG

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	GRANT MAHONEY*	ZACH GUYER
P	DANIEL KUEHL	CHAD POWELL
KR	LEONARD JOHNSON*	DAVID SIMS
PR	JOSH LENZ*	DARIUS REYNOLDS

**Returning starter*

TELLING NUMBER

7 GAMES IN '09 IN WHICH ISU, WHICH HAS THREE OF ITS TOP FOUR RUSHERS RETURNING, RAN FOR AT LEAST 200 YARDS, MOST IN THE CONFERENCE.

FROM LEFT: CHARLIE NEIBERGALL/AP; STEPHEN MALLY/ICON SMI; DAVID PURDY/GETTY IMAGES; DAVID PURDY/CSM

KEY RETURNEES

CB **LEONARD JOHNSON** JUNIOR
The Cyclones' best returning player on defense had 64 tackles and seven pass breakups last season. He's also arguably the Big 12's best kick returner, with a 24.6-yard average on 58 returns in 2009.

LT **KELECHI OSEMELE** JUNIOR
The 6' 5", 327-pound junior started all 13 games last year and was a second-team All-Big 12 selection. He was a big reason why Iowa State gave up only 16 quarterback sacks in '09, third fewest in the conference.

RB **ALEXANDER ROBINSON** SENIOR
He gets overlooked because the Cyclones rarely play on national TV, but A-Rob rushed for 1,195 yards and six touchdowns last season and had 17 receptions.

SS **DAVID SIMS** SENIOR
One of the few assets on a troubled defense, '09's Big 12 Defensive Newcomer of the Year led Iowa State with five interceptions, including a key pick at the goal line in the Insight Bowl, where he also had a team-high seven tackles. Sims made 88 tackles last season, more than any other returning Cyclone.

SIMS

BREAKOUT PLAYER

WR **DARIUS REYNOLDS** JUNIOR
Healed and ready to hit the ground running

In his Iowa State debut last year, Reynolds caught 13 passes for 72 yards in two games before a broken left leg during practice in late September ended his season. At Reedley (Calif.) College in 2007, he threw for 1,752 yards and 13 TDs. Now exclusively a wideout, the 6' 2" 200-pounder has huge big-play potential and could pick up where he left off.

TOP RECRUIT

CB **ANTHONY YOUNG** JUNIOR
Blue-chip transfer provides help in the secondary

The 5' 9", 165-pound defensive back from Palomar (Calif.) College could start on Day One. He was rated the No. 25 junior college prospect by Rivals.com, with 57 tackles and a team-high six picks on the way to becoming the Comets' defensive MVP.

COACH'S Q&A

PAUL RHOADS

ON ELEVATED HOPES AND THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INSIGHT BOWL

SI: *How much excitement was generated by last season's turnaround?*
PR: We exceeded most people's expectations a year ago by winning seven games, which sets the bar higher. We had our tailgate tour in the off-season, and [compared] to where we were when I took over the job, attendance was way up and the enthusiasm was great.

SI: WHY WAS THE INSIGHT BOWL WIN SO SIGNIFICANT?

PR: IF WE HAD LOST THAT GAME, WE WOULD HAVE ENDED UP 6–7, A LOSING RECORD, BUT [INSTEAD WE WON] ONLY THE THIRD BOWL IN THE HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM. RECRUITING IS LEGITIMIZED, FAN BASE AND ALUMNI SUPPORT [ARE] LEGITIMIZED, AND MOST IMPORTANT CREDIBILITY WITH PLAYERS IS LEGITIMIZED.

SI: *How much is Alexander Robinson key to your success going forward?*
PR: A-Rob is a great weapon, and he's moving faster now than he was a year ago. I think he's probably one of the better backs in the country. He has a great grasp of our system, and it's never more apparent than when watching him help the younger kids in bowl preparation. He not only knows the big picture, but he knows the little things as well.

STATE
STATE

ALL CALM IN THE EYE OF THE STORM

A native son has bolstered his mechanics and his confidence—just in time to become the leader the offense needs BY RICHARD DEITSCH

HIS FOOTWORK IN THE POCKET WAS A MESS; HIS ACCURACY WAS AVERAGE AT best; and, as a junior last year, he threw more interceptions and passed for fewer yards than he did as a sophomore. Iowa State's Austen Arnaud knew he had to improve during the off-season and spent most of spring ball reworking his drop-back sequence, learning to be patient with his throws when he was on the run and studying film of any quarterback who starred in systems similar to the Cyclones'. The result? By the end of spring practice coach Paul Rhoads called Arnaud the team's most improved player, a remarkable statement about a senior quarterback entering his third season as starter.

"His knowledge of our offense is so much better, and because of that he is a lot more comfortable," says Rhoads. "Austen is a very energetic, enthusiastic, emotional player, and at times last year that emotion would get outside of him. He would lose his poise on the field. This spring he was very much in control of himself and very much in control of the offense. His technique is markedly improved."

Born and raised in Ames, the 22-year-old Arnaud speaks of ISU with the pride of a local. He was named Gatorade Player of the Year as a senior at Ames High, whose nickname is the Little Cyclones. His father, John, was a three-year starter in the Iowa State secondary from 1980 to '82. (Dad was nicknamed Landshark for his hitting prowess.)

Austen has worked with three coaching staffs at Iowa State (he was initially recruited by former head coach Dan McCarney, now an assistant at Florida, and played his first two years for Gene Chizik, who left for Auburn) but says nothing is like his relationship with Rhoads. "Everybody remembers the day he got here: January 12, 2009," Arnaud says. "We had heard so many good things about him from our AD, and we quickly learned he was the real deal."

"We're about as close as it comes for a player-coach relationship," Arnaud continues. "I'm always talking to him, and he's always asking me questions about what guys are doing off the field and how the relationships between the guys are. He has so much passion and energy, and we feed off of that."

In order for the Cyclones to find success this season, the 6' 3", 225-pound Arnaud must be a major playmaker. Iowa State won games in 2009 with a bend-but-don't-break defense, but massive turnover in that unit means the offense must increase its scoring from its 20.5 point-per-game output last year. There is depth at wideout with Darius Darks, Sedrick Johnson, Jake Williams and Darius Reynolds, and senior running back Alexander Robinson gives Arnaud a weapon in the backfield. The quarterback himself can certainly run—he had 561 yards and eight rushing touchdowns last season—but can he be accurate enough through the air? The answer to that question might be the difference between a four- and a seven-win season.

EXTRA POINT ARNAUD'S 6,054 YARDS RANKS THIRD IN ALLTIME IOWA STATE TOTAL OFFENSE; HE'S RUN OR PASSED FOR 42 CAREER TDS.

Arnaud ran in a team-high eight touchdowns last year.

"Last year when I made bad throws, it was about fundamentals—not having the right footwork or loft on the ball," Arnaud says. "It's night and day for me [compared with] where I am right now. Last year at this time I was only thinking about how I could learn this offense. This year I have a great grip on it." □

STEPHEN MALLY/ICON SMI (LEFT); CHRIS MORRISON/US PRESSWIRE

KANSAS JAYHAWKS

The Jayhawks' most explosive offensive players are gone, but a new coach has arrived—and he's determined to bring his winning ways with him **BY RICHARD DEITSCH**

THE VITALS

COACH Turner Gill (1st year)
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR Chuck Long
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR Carl Torbush
2009 RECORD 5–7 (1–7, 6th in Big 12 North)
FINAL AP RANK NR
RETURNING STARTERS Offense 7, Defense 6
WINS OVER THE LAST FIVE SEASONS 7, 6, 12, 8, 5
2009 RANKINGS Division I-A (Big 12)
RUSHING OFFENSE 101 (9)
PASSING OFFENSE 7 (2)
TOTAL OFFENSE 25 (4)
RUSHING DEFENSE 56 (8)
PASSING DEFENSE 96 (9)
TOTAL DEFENSE 76 (9)

WE KNOW KANSAS HAS AT LEAST ONE GREAT QUARTERBACK IN the fold. Just ask junior wide receiver Daymond Patterson, who recently caught passes from new coach Turner Gill. "He'll throw with the receivers sometimes, and he puts it in there pretty good," says Patterson. "The guy can still throw lasers."

Unfortunately Gill's college eligibilty expired more than a quarter of a century ago. Now the former Nebraska signal-caller's first order of business as Jayhawks coach—he replaces Mark Mangino who resigned last December amid allegations that he mistreated his players—is to find a successor for QB Todd Reesing, the holder of nearly every school passing record. Scrambling sophomore Kale Pick, who has five career passing attempts, is the likely choice. His most experienced target will be senior Johnathan Wilson, who caught 35 passes in '09. Sophomore wideout Bradley McDougald has talent and moxie, and Patterson, also the team's punt returner, can be a X factor in the slot.

These options will have to compensate for another huge loss: the departure of the most productive receiver tandem in Jayhawks history. Dezmon Briscoe and Kerry Meier combined for 186 catches and 17 TDs last season. Says Gill, "Are we going to compare to the numbers those guys put up? I don't know if we can do that. But there are other ways we can [succeed on offense], and that includes taking care of the football. There is enough talent here, particularly at the receiving corps."

The task of making the offense jell falls to coordinator Chuck Long, who held the same position at Oklahoma from 2002 to '05 before serving as head coach at San Diego State for the past three seasons. On the other side of the ball, Gill has brought in high-profile defensive coordinator Carl Torbush, once the head coach at North Carolina. Torbush doesn't have a lot of playmakers, but he does have experience throughout the defense and a particularly strong linebacking unit led by senior Drew Dudley.

Gill revived a moribund Buffaloes program in his last job, taking the Bulls to their first bowl game. After nearly landing at Auburn in '08, Gill now gets his chance to coach in a major conference. There's too much turnover on offense to expect a bowl this season, but 2010 could be crucial in developing a solid Kansas team for years to come.

BIG 12 2010 PREVIEW
BIG 12 NORTH

THE BIG IF CAN A DEFENSE THAT GAVE UP MORE POINTS IN THE FOURTH (104) THAN ANY OTHER QUARTER LAST YEAR CLOSE GAMES?

Corner Chris Harris foiled a team-high nine passes in '09.

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER
4 North Dakota State
11 Georgia Tech
17 at Southern Miss
25 New Mexico State

OCTOBER
2 at Baylor
14 Kansas State
23 Texas A&M
30 at Iowa State

NOVEMBER
6 Colorado
13 at Nebraska
20 Oklahoma State
27 Missouri (in Kansas City, Mo.)

SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

The Jayhawks catch a break by being off the Texas-OU rotation in '10. Georgia Tech and Southern Miss will reveal this team's quality.

Toben Opurum was the go-to running back as KU opened 5–0 last year.

JAKE PAULSEN/SOUTHCREEK GLOBAL/ZUMA PRESS (RIGHT); JOHN RIEGER/US PRESSWIRE

KU
35
KANSAS
Wilson

LAPTAD

PROJECTED LINEUP

OFFENSE

QB	KALE PICK	JORDAN WEBB
RB	TOBEN OPURUM	ANGUS QUIGLEY
FB	JUSTIN PUTHOFF	STEVEN FOSTER
WR	JOHNATHAN WILSON*	BRADLEY MCDOUGALD*
WR	DAYMOND PATTERSON	D.J. BESHEARS
TE	TIM BIERE*	AJ STEWARD
LT	TANNER HAWKINSON*	RILEY SPENCER
LG	SAL CAPRA*	DUANE ZLATNIK
C	JEREMIAH HATCH*	ALEX SMITH
RG	TREVOR MARRONGELLI	MICHAEL MARTINOVICH
RT	BRAD THORSON*	MICHAEL MARTINOVICH

DEFENSE

DE	JAKE LAPTAD*	TRAVIS STEPHENS
DT	JOHN WILLIAMS*	PATRICK DORSEY
DT	RICHARD JOHNSON	DARIUS PARISH
DE	KEVIN YOUNG	QUINTIN WOODS
LB	STEVEN JOHNSON	JACOBY THOMAS
LB	DREW DUDLEY*	JUSTIN SPRINGER
LB	HULDON THARP*	JOSH RICHARDSON
CB	CALVIN RUBLES	GREG BROWN
SS	PHILLIP STROZIER	OLAITAN OGUNTODU
FS	LUBBOCK SMITH*	PRINZE KANDE
CB	CHRIS HARRIS*	ISIAH BARFIELD

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	JACOB BRANSTETTER*	NATHAN KALISH
P	ALONSO ROJAS*	JOHN MILLSAP
KR	DAYMOND PATTERSON*	BRADLEY MCDOUGALD
PR	DAYMOND PATTERSON*	ISIAH BARFIELD

**Returning starter*

TELLING NUMBER

310.3 KU-RECORD PASSING YARDS PER GAME BY 2009'S QBS. OF THOSE, ONLY KALE PICK (22 CAREER YARDS) RETURNS.

FROM LEFT: JEFF MOFFETT/ICON SMI; JAMIE SQUIRE/GETTY IMAGES; JOHN RIEGER/US PRESSWIRE; ORLIN WAGNER/AP

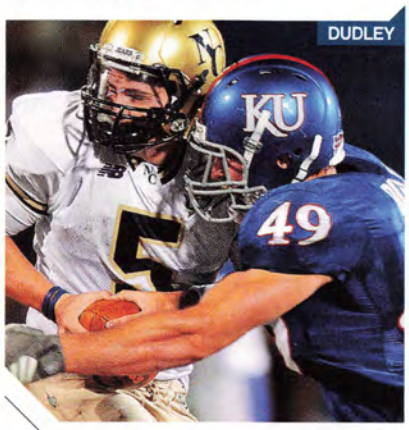
KEY RETURNEES

DE **JAKE LAPTAD** SENIOR
The two-time All-Big 12 honorable mention had a team-high 6½ sacks in 2009 and led Kansas linemen with 49 tackles, including 12 for loss. Jayhawks coaches named the 6' 4", 260-pound Laptad the team's defensive MVP.

RB **TOBEN OPURUM** SOPHOMORE
The 6' 1" 240-pounder led Kansas in rushing (554 yards and nine touchdowns over 11 games), but will he be able to come back strong after the season-ending lower-leg injury that he suffered last November against Texas?

WR **JOHNATHAN WILSON** SENIOR
Last year's third option—he caught 35 passes for 449 yards—becomes this season's No. 1 threat. He also caught 43 passes in '08, and the Jayhawks are hoping he'll pad his current career TD total (three).

LB **DREW DUDLEY** SENIOR
He finished second on the team in tackles (88) and had six quarterback hurries and a fumble recovery. Dudley rises in big games: He made 17 tackles against Colorado and nine each against Nebraska and Texas.


DUDLEY

BREAKOUT PLAYER

WR **BRADLEY McDOUGALD** SOPHOMORE
Position shift for an eager playmaker

McDougald moves from the slot to the outside after catching 33 passes for 318 yards last season. He started six games as a freshman (while also seeing some time at safety) and he does not lack confidence. "I can be a go-to player," McDougald has said. "Even though I'm a young guy, I can be counted on in clutch situations."

TOP RECRUIT

RB **BRANDON BOURBON** FRESHMAN
Cardinal's loss could be Jayhawks' gain

Bourbon had made an oral commitment to Stanford but chose to go to Lawrence, which is closer to his home. The four-star recruit ran track for Potosi (Mo.) High and broke the school's record in the 100 meters (10.4 seconds).

COACH'S Q&A

TURNER GILL

ON FITTING IN AND THE IMPORTANCE OF DISCIPLINE

SI: *After coaching four seasons at Buffalo, why was Kansas right for you?*
TG: Our oldest daughter, Jordan, was already [a student] at the university. My wife and our younger daughter were also [moving] closer to family in the Midwest. Then there was my relationship with [athletic director] Lew Perkins and the things done to move this program forward. I just thought I was the best fit, but more important, it was the best fit for my family.

SI: YOU HAVE INSTITUTED A CURSE-FREE ZONE AT PRACTICE. HOW ARE THE KIDS RESPONDING?

TG: IT'S NOT JUST THE KIDS; IT'S THE WHOLE STAFF. WE ARE HERE TO DEVELOP YOUNG MEN FOR OUR SOCIETY THROUGH FOOTBALL.

SI: *Can you explain that?*
TG: When [the players] go to a job interview, I want them to know how to talk and present themselves in a proper way. My responsibility is to coach football, but I look at it as teaching discipline. If you are disciplined, you will be disciplined on the field, in the classroom [and] in society. I am preparing young men for life with football and for life without football.
SI: *Does it get as cold in Lawrence in January as it did in Buffalo?*
TG: It gets cold, but it doesn't last as long. They said this past winter in Lawrence was the worst in 25 years, so I kind of felt I had not left Buffalo at all.

KU
adidas
KA
15

BACK WHERE HE BELONGS

After spending two years as a cornerback, the natural receiver is returning to the offense to do what he does best: make big plays BY RICHARD DEITSCH

DAYMOND PATTERSON'S COLLEGIATE DEBUT TWO SEASONS AGO PORTENDED dynamic changes for the Jayhawks program. The true freshman returned four punts for 135 yards in a rout of Florida International and took his fourth punt return of the night 75 yards for a touchdown, leaping over a falling defender near the 25-yard line on his way. "That kid," gushed then Kansas quarterback Todd Reesing, "he's the kind of guy that can change games."

But it never happened. Patterson, a wideout, caught 14 passes for 154 yards and two touchdowns in the first four games of 2008, but then because of a glut of receivers and problems in the secondary, Jayhawks coaches asked the fleet 5' 9" 173-pounder to switch to cornerback. In seven games at the position Patterson made 21 tackles and broke up two passes.

"I wasn't the happiest person [at cornerback]," says Patterson, who was one of only three NCAA players to start on both offense and defense that season. "But I worked every day to be the best I could be and to help the team. I wasn't going to sit there and pout. That's not the type of person I am." He remained at corner throughout 2009, finishing with 31 tackles and five pass breakups.

Now it's 2010, head coach Mark Mangino is gone, and, even more relevant, so is Kansas's spectacular and prolific wide receiver duo of Dezmon Briscoe and Kerry Meier. (Both are now in the NFL.) With the passing attack's needing a boost and Patterson's having requested a return to his old position, new coach Turner Gill has made Patterson into a wideout again. "I love playing receiver," Patterson said this spring. "That's where I want to be."

That's the position he played at North Mesquite (Texas) High, where as a senior he was named all-state after catching 69 passes for 826 yards and 12 touchdowns.

As a Jayhawk, Patterson is expected to line up in the slot position this season—the same spot that current Baltimore Ravens receiver Mark Clayton excelled at when he played in Chuck Long's offense at Oklahoma in the early 2000s. Long is now the Jayhawks' offensive coordinator. "The hardest part has been my route running," Patterson says. "I need to get back to the smoothness I had before. But I think I can have a very big role in the slot this year. I feel I can make some big plays."

That will be needed on a team that lacks proven playmakers and on an offense that will likely use a variety of formations this year, including an increased number of running-back sets. "It's a more balanced offense, and I think that will help us," Patterson says. "We will try to control the clock more. The offense we are putting in will be something the Big 12 has not seen from us."

EXTRA POINT PATTERSON SET A SCHOOL RECORD IN THE TRIPLE JUMP FOR NORTH MESQUITE HIGH'S TRACK AND FIELD TEAM.

The Texas native picked off a pass in a win over Duke.

Patterson, who is studying sports management and was second-team Academic All–Big 12 last season, believes that his experience as a cornerback will help him as a receiver. He has learned what defensive backs are looking for while in coverage, and he gained an insider's perspective on how coaches game-plan against receivers. "He can have an impact because he has speed, and he can make people miss," says Gill. "That's a guy who can put the ball in the end zone. He's a guy who is special with the ball in his hands." In other words, a game-changer. □

WD/ICON SMI (LEFT); JAKE PAULSEN/SOUTHCREEK GLOBAL/ZUMA PRESS

KANSAS STATE WILDCATS

The Wildcats have a pack of versatile role players to work into their signature formation and a vital weapon in the familiar presence of a beloved coach **BY GARY GRAMLING**

THE VITALS

COACH Bill Snyder (19th year) 142-74-1 (80-58-1 in Big 12)
CO-OFFENSIVE COORDINATORS Dana Dimel, Del Miller
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR Chris Cosh
2009 RECORD 6–6 (4–4, 3rd in Big 12 North)
FINAL AP RANK NR
RETURNING STARTERS Offense 5, Defense 7
WINS OVER THE LAST FIVE SEASONS 5, 7, 5, 5, 6
2009 RANKINGS Division I-A (Big 12)
RUSHING OFFENSE 35 (3)
PASSING OFFENSE 106 (12)
TOTAL OFFENSE 80 (9)
RUSHING DEFENSE 16 (5)
PASSING DEFENSE 83 (7)
TOTAL DEFENSE 39 (5)

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A WILD CARD IN THE BIG 12, LOOK NO further than Manhattan, Kans. The Wildcats don't have overwhelming talent, but they're a well-rounded group of athletes who could overachieve and become a dark-horse contender in the North Division.

Running back Daniel Thomas, last year's Big 12 Newcomer of the Year, will continue to carry the bulk of the team's hopes, making up for its questionable passing situation with his ability to run out of Kansas State's Wildcat formation. Senior Carson Coffman is most likely to open the season at quarterback, though he is vulnerable: Last September he lost his starting job after three shaky games. Sophomore Collin Klein, an athletic passer who played receiver last season, and juco transfer Sammuel Lamur, another dual threat, will push Coffman for the top spot in August. The Wildcats can also snap the ball to Thomas or to wideout Chris Harper, an Oregon transfer who played part-time quarterback for the Ducks.

An intriguing group of receivers will replace the ultraproductive Brandon Banks: Among others there's Aubrey Quarles, who returns from a seasonlong medical absence; Brodrick Smith, a former four-star recruit who transferred from Minnesota; and 5' 7" speed merchant Tramaine Thompson, a redshirt freshman. Thompson could also fill Banks's void in the return game, one of the team's strong suits last year.

The strength of K-State's 4-2-5 defense is in the backfield, led by All–Big 12 candidates Tysyn Hartman, Emmanuel Lamur and Troy Butler at the safeties, while David Garrett and Terrance Sweeney anchor an unproven group of cornerbacks. They'll have their work cut out for them in the pass-happy Big 12, especially with a rebuilt front four trying to create pressure. The D-line is shaky up the middle, so defensive ends such as Brandon Harold and juco transfer Adam Davis must emerge as effective edge rushers.

Kansas State does have an ace up its sleeve: legendary coach Bill Snyder, who was coaxed out of retirement last season in hopes of working his magic on the program once again. If his current cast of multipurpose contributors—many of whom cut their teeth with other programs—can find chemistry as a unit, the rest of the division could be in for a surprise.

BIG 12 2010 PREVIEW
BIG 12 NORTH

THE BIG IF WILL A NEW FACE LIKE HARPER **EMERGE AS ANOTHER DIFFERENCE-MAKER** TO HELP DANIEL THOMAS SHOULDER THE LOAD?

Harper caught, ran and threw TDs for Oregon in '08.

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER
4 UCLA
11 MISSOURI STATE
18 IOWA STATE (in Kansas City, Mo.)
25 CENTRAL FLORIDA

OCTOBER
7 NEBRASKA
14 AT KANSAS
23 AT BAYLOR
30 OKLAHOMA STATE

NOVEMBER
6 TEXAS
13 AT MISSOURI
20 AT COLORADO
27 AT NORTH TEXAS

SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

Beating either UCLA or Central Florida is a must for bowl hopes. Wins at Kansas and Missouri could make the Wildcats Big 12 North champs.

Coffman needs to perform more consistently in order to keep his job.

PETER G. AIKEN/GETTY IMAGES (RIGHT); WD/ICON SMI

K-STATE
Riddell
DILLEHAY

PROJECTED LINEUP

OFFENSE

QB	CARSON COFFMAN	COLLIN KLEIN
RB	DANIEL THOMAS*	WILLIAM POWELL
FB	BRADEN WILSON	FRANK DELARUE
WR	AUBREY QUARLES	BRODRICK SMITH
WR	ADRIAN HILBURN	CHRIS HARPER
TE	TRAVIS TANNAHILL	ANDRE MCDONALD
LT	ZACH HANSON	KALEB DRINKGERN
LG	ZACH KENDALL*	TREVOR VIERS
C	WADE WEIBERT*	CORNELIUS LUCAS
RG	KENNETH MAYFIELD*	COLTEN FREEZE
RT	CLYDE AUFNER*	WILLIAM COOPER

DEFENSE

DE	BRANDON HAROLD	ADAM DAVIS
DT	RAPHAEL GUIDRY*	JAVONTA BOYD
DT	PRIZELL BROWN	RAY KIBBLE
DE	ANTONIO FELDER*	JOSH BERARD
LB	ALEX HREBEC*	JARELL CHILDS
LB	KADERO TERRELL	KEVIN ROHLEDER
CB	STEPHEN HARRISON*	TERRANCE SWEENEY
S	TROY BUTLER*	ROMAN FIELDS
S	TYSYN HARTMAN*	THOMAS FERGUSON
S	EMMANUEL LAMUR*	LOGAN DOLD
CB	DAVID GARRETT	MATTHEW PEARSON

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	JOSH CHERRY*	ANTHONY CANTELE
P	RYAN DOERR*	D.J. FULHAGE
KR	TRAMAINE THOMPSON	JOHN HUBERT
PR	DANIEL THOMAS*	TYSYN HARTMAN

**Returning starter*

TELLING NUMBER

3 STRAIGHT YEARS THAT A WILDCAT HAS BEEN NAMED BIG 12 OFFENSIVE NEWCOMER OF THE YEAR; DANIEL THOMAS WON LAST SEASON.

FROM LEFT: SCOTT SEWELL/ICON SMI; JIM OWENS/ICON SMI; CHRIS WILLIAMS/ICON SMI; SCOTT SEWELL/CSM

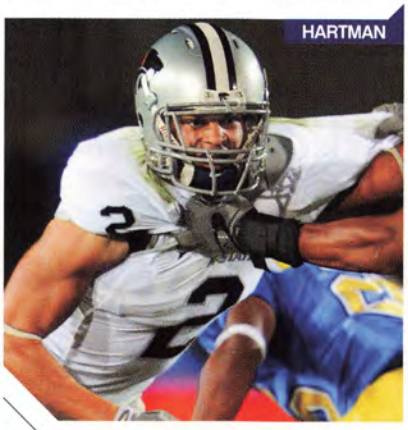
KEY RETURNEES

QB **CARSON COFFMAN** SENIOR
Mediocre play against UMass and Lafayette followed by a disastrous performance against UCLA cost him the starting job early last year. Coffman's ability to scramble and move in the pocket has earned him a second chance, but with a season-opening rematch against the Bruins, he'll be on a short leash.

LB **ALEX HREBEC** SENIOR
The former walk-on is limited athletically but brings the leadership and physicality needed in the middle of the Wildcats' 4-2-5 defense. With 100 tackles and nine career starts, his play will be the key to the front six.

WR **AUBREY QUARLES** SENIOR
The only receiver on the roster with a proven track record (34 catches in 2008) returns after missing all of last year with a leg injury. He'll have to be a rock for the talented but unsettled receiving corps.

S **TYSYN HARTMAN** JUNIOR
The rangy Hartman has a knack for being in the right place at the right time. He tied for fourth in the Big 12 with five interceptions in '09. He will need to make more big plays this season to compensate for potential problems with the pass rush and the cornerbacks.


HARTMAN

BREAKOUT PLAYER

DE **BRANDON HAROLD** JUNIOR
Finally healthy and ready to sack it to them

Knee problems all but erased Harold's sophomore season, but the coaching staff expects him to be at 100% this fall. He was an All-America in 2008 as a freshman with 10½ tackles for loss. Harold must keep his academics in order (poor grades kept him out of spring practice), but he's poised to wreak havoc in Big 12 backfields again.

TOP RECRUIT

WR **CHRIS HARPER** SOPHOMORE
Adding yet another wild card to the Wildcat

As if K-State needed more versatility on offense. At Oregon, Harper had 137 rushing yards, 122 receiving yards, 40 passing yards and five touchdowns as a freshman in '08. The Wildcats will use him primarily as a force out of the slot.

COACH'S Q&A

BILL SNYDER

ON SAVING K-STATE AND ENJOYING HIS (BRIEF) RETIREMENT

SI: *You built this program into a power during your first tenure [1989–2005]. How far is it from being back among the Big 12's elite?*
BS: [The top teams] are many miles down the road. We're just trying to get better on a regular basis. Is [the program] moving in the right direction? I believe so. We still have hiccups. But I'm not unhappy.
SI: *Before returning last season, what did you do during your three-year retirement?*
BS: I have five children and eight grandchildren, and I made sure that they were first on the calendar. From a football standpoint I was a voter on the [retired coaches'] Legends Poll. I got involved with the Kansas State University leadership studies program. And I serve on several boards: [the] Kansas Sports Hall of Fame, a couple of business boards.

SI: HOW MUCH LONGER WILL YOU COACH?

BS: I WAS ASKED TO COME BACK AND CALM THE WATERS, SO TO SPEAK, WITH THE KANSAS STATE [FANS]. HOW LONG WILL THAT TAKE? I'M NOT CERTAIN. HOPEFULLY WE GET IT DONE, AND THEN I'LL GO BACK TO MY GRANDCHILDREN.

SI: *In your two decades at Kansas State, what's been your favorite moment?*
BS: Probably when my son Sean [transferred to] Kansas State from Iowa. And when he became a consensus first-team All-America [punter, in 1992].

K-STATE
8

HE'S GOT IT MADE IN MANHATTAN

Thomas's restless legs carried him through three schools before reaching Kansas State, where he is now primed to go a lot further BY GARY GRAMLING

TWO YEARS AGO THE KANSAS STATE BRASS CAME TO A CONCLUSION: THEY wanted the ball in Daniel Thomas's hands. After the 230-pounder powered his way to a Big 12 rushing title in his first season, it's amazing that anyone could have thought otherwise. ¶ But Thomas, who was a dual-threat quarterback and safety at Northwest Mississippi Community College, had been pursued as a defensive back by Oklahoma, Florida State and Ole Miss, among others. "[Kansas State] recruited me to play running back," says Thomas, "and that's the reason I committed here."

While the senior tailback's running style is straightforward, his journey to Manhattan was anything but. After two years at NMCC, he still wasn't academically qualified for Kansas State. He had to sit out all of 2008 attending classes at Butler County and Manhattan Christian community colleges before he could enroll.

He was worth the wait. Bill Snyder was ready to include him in his quarterback competition, but Thomas opted to work as a running back instead. (Of course it's a minor distinction at K-State, which uses the Wildcat formation as often as just about any school in the nation.) He opened the season as the starter and the focal point of the offense.

"I was hungry for it," Thomas says. "After sitting and watching for a year, I was just so ready. I wanted to come out and make an impact right away."

And he did. Thomas rushed for 100 yards in three of his first four games. He finished the season with a conference-leading 1,265 yards on 247 carries while adding 25 catches and going 3 for 4 with a touchdown as a passer.

"He can run so many different ways out of that [Wildcat] package," says Dana Dimel, the running backs coach and co-offensive coordinator. "He's the best guy in the country out of [that formation]."

Despite his size—6' 2", 230 pounds—Thomas has stayed light on his feet. "He has that Adrian Peterson type of body," Dimel says. "But he changes directions very smoothly. More than any other [big back] he almost floats by you."

Thomas's running style is relentless. With his powerful lower body he consistently keeps his legs churning after contact, twisting and turning for extra yards on the way down and occasionally carrying tacklers on his back.

"Every time he carries the ball, he runs until he can't run any more," says Snyder. "That's an amazing trait for a guy in this day and age."

Thomas's attitude fits perfectly with this Kansas State team's no-stars philosophy. The son of two preachers, the most often-used word in his vocabulary is *sir*. Snyder describes him as "a gentle giant, very soft-spoken."

EXTRA POINT THOMAS'S 150 YARDS FROM SCRIMMAGE AT NEBRASKA LAST YEAR WERE **THE MOST OF ANY PLAYER AGAINST THE HUSKERS' D.**

Thomas ran in K-State's lone TD against UCLA in '09.

This season Dimel wants Thomas to become more of a big-play threat, allowing him to take advantage of his sub-4.5 speed. (While he averaged 5.1 yards per attempt last year, only one carry was for more than 40 yards.) The ability to break away would go far toward helping Thomas reach his goal of 1,800 rushing yards for 2010.

Opponents will undoubtedly key on containing him, though the Wildcats hope their fresh talent at wide receiver and a couple of athletic young QBs will give defenses something else to think about. One thing isn't changing, however: Kansas State still wants the ball in Thomas's hands. □

WD/ICON SMI (LEFT); JEFF GROSS/GETTY IMAGES

MISSOURI TIGERS

The Tigers have long been big fish in a small North division pond. But this year's leviathans could actually play with the genuine big boys of the Big 12 **BY ANDREW LAWRENCE**

THE VITALS

COACH Gary Pinkel (10th year) 67–46 (36–36 in Big 12)
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR David Yost
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR Dave Steckel
2009 RECORD 8–5 (4–4, 2nd in Big 12 North)
FINAL AP RANK NR
RETURNING STARTERS Offense 8, Defense 9
WINS OVER THE LAST FIVE SEASONS 7, 9, 13, 11, 8
2009 RANKINGS Division I-A (Big 12)
RUSHING OFFENSE 85 (8)
PASSING OFFENSE 14 (4)
TOTAL OFFENSE 32 (6)
RUSHING DEFENSE 26 (6)
PASSING DEFENSE 104 (11)
TOTAL DEFENSE 64 (8)

AT MISSOURI THERE ARE NO SUCH THINGS AS SMALL achievements—just small players. Or so it has always seemed. It's a difference that has been thrown into particularly sharp relief in interdivision play. In the North, which Missouri has won twice in the past three years, the Tigers match up well against teams that are similar or smaller in size. But against rivals from the South, Missouri can look like a JV squad scrimmaging against the varsity. Nowhere has the gap been more obvious than in the trenches, where undersized Mizzou offensive linemen have traditionally spread out and sat back, drawing their more hulking defensive counterparts in instead of taking the fight to them.

But lately the Tigers have put together an O-line that can measure up with the conference's best. Having added 305-pound guard Jayson Palmgren to a group of massive returning starters, the Tigers are hoping they can beef up their ground game. With valuable experience under their plus-size belts, the unit of center Tim Barnes (6' 4", 310 pounds), left tackle Elvis Fisher (6' 5", 300), right tackle Dan Hoch (6' 7", 315) and left guard Austin Wuebbels (6' 4", 305) should be able to grind out yards when needed even though they remain nimble enough for the finesse of the Tigers' spread offense, keyed by quarterback Blaine Gabbert and tailback Derrick Washington. Hoch is the scariest of the O-lineman and looks like he could treat almost any pass rusher as if the poor guy were his little brother. (Although Hoch's actual little brother, Matt—a 6' 5", 245-pound freshman tight end—is a beast.)

As for Mizzou's own defensive line, the emergence of sophomore end Aldon Smith has taken much of the sting out of the departure of linebacker Sean Weatherspoon, the Tigers' best defender and emotional leader. Like most underclassmen, Smith is largely oblivious to his own potential—"He doesn't know how good he can be," gushes Weatherspoon—but Smith's stats (he paced conference ends with 11½ sacks and 64 tackles in '09) emphasize his enormous upside. In addition to being athletic, he's also one of the biggest men on the defense, tipping the scales at 6' 5" and 255 pounds. That alone could carry Mizzou a long way in a conference in which size definitely matters.

BIG 12 2010 PREVIEW
BIG 12 NORTH

THE BIG IF CAN DAN HOCH AND HIS FELLOW O-LINE GIANTS **CREATE TIME AND SPACE FOR WASHINGTON** TO PUSH THE GROUND GAME?

Hoch paved the way for a 29-points-per-game offense.

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER
4 ILLINOIS (in St. Louis)
11 MCNEESE STATE
18 SAN DIEGO STATE
25 MIAMI (OHIO)

OCTOBER
9 COLORADO
16 AT TEXAS A&M
23 OKLAHOMA
30 AT NEBRASKA

NOVEMBER
6 AT TEXAS TECH
13 KANSAS STATE
20 AT IOWA STATE
27 KANSAS (in Kansas City, Mo.)

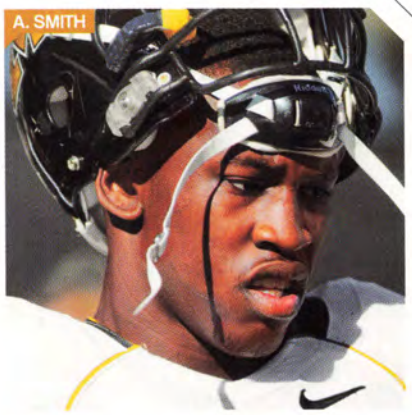
SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

Mizzou could be unbeaten going into its Oct. 23 homecoming, but that game and the following two will decide the season.

Wiry linebacker Will Ebner tackled Longhorns seven times last season.

SCOTT ROVAK/US PRESSWIRE (RIGHT); JEFF MOFFETT/ICON SMI

22
EAKER


A. SMITH

PROJECTED LINEUP

OFFENSE

QB	BLAINE GABBERT*	JIMMY COSTELLO
TB	DERRICK WASHINGTON*	DE'VION MOORE
WR	ROLANDIS WOODLAND	L'DAMIAN WASHINGTON
WR	JERRELL JACKSON	T.J. MOE
WR	WES KEMP*	GAHN MCGAFFIE
TE	ANDREW JONES*	MICHAEL EGNEW
LT	ELVIS FISHER*	MARK HILL
LG	AUSTIN WUEBBELS*	JUSTIN BRITT
C	TIM BARNES*	TRAVIS RUTH
RG	JAYSON PALMGREN	MAX COPELAND
RT	DAN HOCH*	JACK MEINERS

DEFENSE

DE	JACQUIES SMITH*	BRAD MADISON
DT	TERRELL RESONNO	GEORGE WHITE
DT	DOMINIQUE HAMILTON*	JIMMY BURGE
DE	ALDON SMITH*	MARCUS MALBROUGH
LB	ANDREW GACHKAR*	DONOVAN BONNER
LB	WILL EBNER*	LUKE LAMBERT
LB	ZAVIAR GOODEN	TYLER CRANE
CB	KEVIN RUTLAND*	TREY HOBSON
SS	JARRELL HARRISON*	TAVON BOLDEN
FS	JASPER SIMMONS*	KENJI JACKSON
CB	CARL GETTIS*	KIP EDWARDS

SPECIAL TEAMS

K	GRANT RESSEL*	PAT SMITH
P	MATT GRABNER	TREY BARROW
KR	CARL GETTIS	JASPER SIMMONS
PR	CARL GETTIS	KIP EDWARDS

*Returning starter

TELLING NUMBER

5 CONSECUTIVE WINNING SEASONS FOR THE TIGERS, THE TEAM'S LONGEST STREAK SINCE A RUN OF 15 STRAIGHT ENDED IN 1992.

FROM LEFT: DUSTIN BRADFORD/ICON SMI; JEFF CURRY/US PRESSWIRE; JAMIE SQUIRE/GETTY IMAGES; L.G. PATTERSON/AP

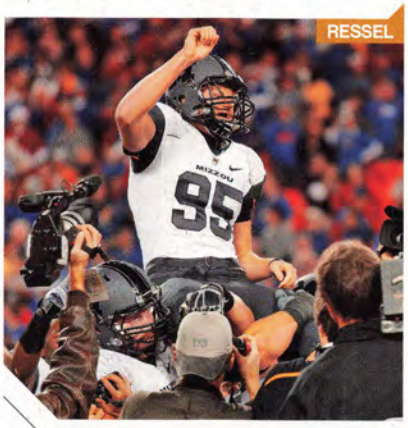
KEY RETURNEES

LB **WILL EBNER** JUNIOR
The 6' 1", 230-pound dervish should be the latest in Mizzou's string of all-conference linebackers. A stinging hitter with a nonstop motor, Ebner was a bother to QBs (3½ sacks) and a bane to ballcarriers, busting them for 78 tackles, including 9½ for loss.

RT **DAN HOCH** JUNIOR
Size wasn't the problem for the 6' 7", 315-pound people mover, the biggest Tiger on the roster; it was endurance. A preseason right meniscus tear robbed him of conditioning time in '09, though he still started all 13 games and reinforced a line that allowed just 20 sacks and this year could also feature his brother, Matt, a freshman tight end.

TB **DERRICK WASHINGTON** SENIOR
Though the 6-foot, 225-pound back paced Missouri in rushing for the second straight year, his numbers (865 yards and 10 TDs) were limited by knee injuries.

K **GRANT RESSEL** JUNIOR
In his breakthrough 2009 season, the All-America made 65 of 66 total kicks and was a semifinalist for the Lou Groza Award for top collegiate placekicker.


RESSEL

BREAKOUT PLAYER

TE **MICHAEL EGNEW** JUNIOR
Was quarterback's favorite in the spring

The hard-nosed blocker's soft hands, speed and surplus of athleticism make him an ideal target in an offense that loves throwing to the tight end. Not only did the 6' 6", 225-pound Egnew show considerable potential at the position last year, but he also proved versatile enough to line up at some wideout spots later in the season.

TOP RECRUIT

OT **NICK DEMIEN** FRESHMAN
Led high-school team to three district titles

The 6' 6", 295-pound Army All-American overcame a knee injury to become one of the most sought-after offensive linemen in the nation. A Wentzville, Mo., native, Demien has the footwork and technique to alight at either tackle spot.

COACH'S Q&A

GARY PINKEL

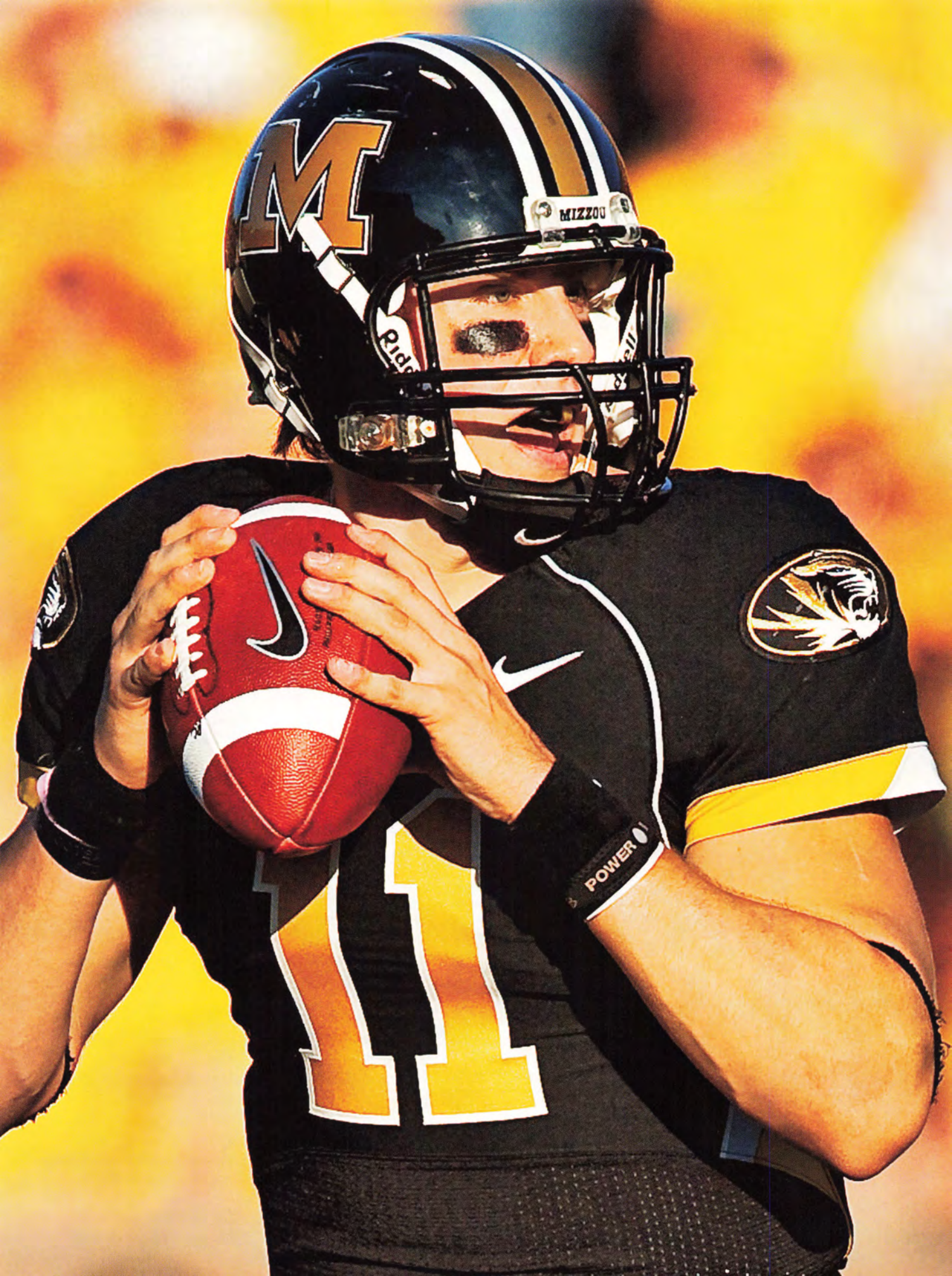
ON GAME-DAY MEMORIES AND JACK LAMBERT'S TEETH

SI: *What's your fondest memory of playing at Kent State?*
GP: When we won the [Mid-American Conference] championship in 1972. The impact that had on the atmosphere of the whole school . . . I'm very proud to have been a part of [it].
SI: *You played with future Hall of Famer Jack Lambert in college. What was he like then?*
GP: He was a very tough guy and he liked to have a good time, but he always had his head on straight. I always lied and told everybody that I was the one who knocked his teeth out, but it wasn't really me.

SI: HOW MUCH HAS BLAINE GABBERT MATURED SINCE THE END OF LAST SEASON?

GP: LIKE ANY QUARTERBACK, THERE'S A NATURAL MATURATION. YOU'VE LEARNED A LOT, SEEN MORE THINGS, AND BECAUSE OF YOUR EXPERIENCE LEVEL, YOU CAN TAKE THE NEXT STEP. WE EXPECT HIM TO HAVE A VERY GOOD YEAR.

SI: *How has Mizzou gained its recent recruiting foothold in Texas?*
GP: Hard work by our staff, earning the trust of high school coaches that we'll develop [their kids] on and off the field. Certainly Danario Alexander being a first-team All-America and Chase Daniel playing in the NFL have been positive for us.


M
MIZZOU
11
POWER

PASSING THE TORCH AT MIZZOU

Rocket-armed Blaine Gabbert is the latest—and could possibly become the greatest—QB to come out of an emerging Missouri tradition BY ANDREW LAWRENCE

IF THE MARK OF AN ELITE PROGRAM LIES IN ITS ABILITY TO CONSISTENTLY produce top talent at one position (as Penn State has done at linebacker and USC at tailback), then a quarterback boom has the Tigers poised to become a national power. Since coach Gary Pinkel arrived in Columbia nine years ago, Missouri has blossomed from an offensive nonfactor into a quarterbacks' cradle. His last two protégés—Brad Smith, the NCAA's most prolific all-purpose quarterback, and Chase Daniel, Mizzou's first conference offensive player of the year—were integral to the Tigers' transformation into perennial North division contenders.

Pinkel's latest pupil might be better than them both. Like Smith, Blaine Gabbert has a strong right arm and sweet feet. Like Daniel, he is an accurate passer who sees the field well. That's thanks in large part to Gabbert's familiarity with the spread offense, which he ran at Parkway West High in Ballwin, Mo., as one of the best QB prospects in the country. Oh, and did we mention that he's 6' 5" and weighs 240 pounds?

As a sophomore starter in '09, Gabbert flashed the kind of potential that could have Mizzou making a leap from playing in second-tier postseason games (or third tier, as was the case in last season's Texas Bowl) to headlining a BCS bowl. A second-team all-Big 12 nod, he threw for more yards (3,593) than either Daniel or Smith in their first years as starters and finished second in the conference to Texas's Colt McCoy in efficiency rating (140.5).

Gabbert did most of this after suffering a high right ankle injury in the conference opener against Nebraska. "I had to rearrange all my mechanics after that because I couldn't really put much [weight] on that leg," Gabbert says. "It threw my game off."

Gabbert worked intensely with the Tigers' medical and strength and conditioning staffs to stay in the games, and that determination earned him major leadership points from coaches and teammates. He further bolstered his reputation last spring by becoming more vocal and taking ownership of the offense.

With the departures of Jared Perry and Danario Alexander (the nation's leading pass catcher in '09) costing Mizzou almost 67% of its receiving yardage, Gabbert will lean on returning wideouts Jerrell Jackson, Wes Kemp and T.J. Moe and trust that the experience they gained as underclassmen last year will keep the Tigers' offense humming. "That's the good thing about our system," Gabbert says. "You can plug people in, and they're gonna be extremely productive."

EXTRA POINT GABBERT HELPED CHANGE HIS BROTHER TYLER'S, MIND ABOUT MU AFTER HE HAD COMMITTED TO NEBRASKA.

Blaine threw for 291 yards in the Texas Bowl loss.

That's true, as long as Gabbert can remain consistent, especially at home. For all of his brilliance on the road—he completed 61.6% of his passes, threw just five interceptions and took a mere six sacks while leading Missouri to a 5–1 record—he faltered at Faurot Field, where he was more than five percentage points less accurate, threw almost double the picks and was sacked more than twice as often during a 3–4 stretch. He expects to be at his best by the Tigers' Oct. 23 homecoming date with Oklahoma, whom Mizzou last defeated 12 years ago at Faurot. If Gabbert were to engineer an upset, it wouldn't just mark a breakthrough for him; it could be the start of something big for the entire program. □

JEFF MOFFETT/ICON SMI (LEFT); BOB LEVEY/ICON SMI

NEBRASKA CORNHUSKERS

Once upon a time the Huskers had a premier program. Now, with a healthy offense to match their trusty defense, a renaissance may be nigh **BY LARS ANDERSON**

THE VITALS

COACH Bo Pelini (3rd year) 19–8 (11–6 in Big 12)
OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR Shawn Watson
DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR Carl Pelini
2009 RECORD 10–4 (6–3, 1st in Big 12 North)
FINAL AP RANK 14
RETURNING STARTERS Offense 10, Defense 7
WINS OVER THE LAST FIVE SEASONS 8, 9, 5, 9, 10
2009 RANKINGS Division I-A (Big 12)
RUSHING OFFENSE 62 (6)
PASSING OFFENSE 101 (11)
TOTAL OFFENSE 99 (11)
RUSHING DEFENSE 9 (3)
PASSING DEFENSE 18 (1)
TOTAL DEFENSE 7 (2)

THE WORDS WERE DELIVERED IN A STERN, FORCEFUL VOICE, the kind that Bo Pelini uses when he means business. Moments after Nebraska had dismantled Arizona 33–0 in the Holiday Bowl last December, the coach grabbed a microphone and announced to the crowd, "Nebraska's back, and we're here to stay!"

For the first time in nearly a decade, the Huskers could be a national championship contender. They should field one of the nation's top defenses, with seven starters returning to a unit that in 2009 led the country in scoring defense (10.4 points per game) and ranked in the top 10 nationally in four major defensive categories.

But to win its first Big 12 title since 1999, Nebraska—which nearly knocked off Texas in last year's conference title game, losing 13–12 on a last-second field goal—will need more production from an offense that finished 99th in the country in total yards per game in 2009. The Huskers have more offensive starters coming back (10) than any other team in the Big 12, and although badly weakened by injuries throughout '09, the unit hit its stride in that Holiday Bowl rout, when it churned out 396 total yards. "When we were finally healthy in the bowl game, our offense did what we expected it to do," says Pelini. "We are getting closer to where we want to be, and that's playing for and winning national championships. We've changed the culture around here, and now we just have to go out and do it."

After Nebraska's victory over Arizona, quarterback Zac Lee made a confession to reporters: He had played most of the season with a torn tendon in his right elbow. How bad was the injury? Before a few games Lee warned his receivers that he wouldn't be able to put his usual zip on passes. Aware of Lee's flagging arm strength in the second half of 2009, offensive coordinator Shawn Watson grew conservative in his play-calling. But now that Lee, who sat out the spring, is fully recovered, the Huskers will throw the ball down the field more.

"We're definitely going to be more explosive on offense," says receiver Niles Paul. "Injuries just killed us last year, but now we've got a lot of experienced guys coming back. We know our defense is going to be special, so if we do our jobs we should have a very, very good season."

BIG 12 2010 PREVIEW
BIG 12 NORTH

THE BIG IF AFTER MISSING THE SPRING, **WILL LEE BE READY TO THROW DOWNFIELD** AND TAKE THE HUSKERS TO A BCS BOWL?

Lee's pass attempts were limited late last season.

SCHEDULE

SEPTEMBER
4 Western Kentucky
11 Idaho
18 at Washington
25 South Dakota State

OCTOBER
7 at Kansas State
16 Texas
23 at Oklahoma State
30 Missouri

NOVEMBER
6 at Iowa State
13 Kansas
20 at Texas A&M
26 Colorado

SCHEDULE ANALYSIS

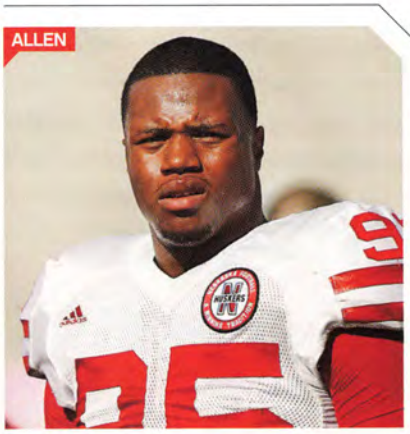
Nice. Other than the road trip to face Washington, the Huskers play their other two key games—against Texas and Missouri—at home.

Rex Burkhead, here behind tight end Ryan Hill, can grind when healthy.

JAMES D. SMITH/ICON SMI (RIGHT); BOB DONNAN/US PRESSWIRE

HUSKERS
Riddell
80
NEBRASKA FOOTBALL
HUSKERS
WINNING TRADITION

ALLEN



PROJECTED LINEUP

OFFENSE

QB	ZAC LEE*	CODY GREEN
RB	ROY HELU JR.*	REX BURKHEAD
FB	TYLER LEGATE*	MIKE HAYS
WR	NILES PAUL*	CURENSKI GILLEYLEN
WR	KHIRY COOPER*	BRANDON KINNIE
TE	MIKE MCNEILL*	DREU YOUNG
LT	MIKE SMITH*	JERMARCUS HARDRICK
LG	KEITH WILLIAMS*	NICK ASH
C	MIKE CAPUTO	BRIAN THORSON
RG	RICKY HENRY*	D.J. JONES
RT	MARCEL JONES*	JEREMIAH SIRLES

DEFENSE

DE	CAMERON MEREDITH	JASON ANKRAH
DT	BAKER STEINKUHLER	TERRENCE MOORE
DT	JARED CRICK*	JUSTIN JACKSON
DE	PIERRE ALLEN*	JOSH WILLIAMS
LB	MATHEW MAY	THOMAS GROVE
LB	WILL COMPTON*	MATT HOLT
LB	SEAN FISHER*	ERIC MARTIN
CB	PRINCE AMUKAMARA*	DEJON GOMES
SS	P.J. SMITH	RICKEY THENARSE
FS	ERIC HAGG*	AUSTIN CASSIDY
CB	ALFONZO DENNARD*	ANTHONY WEST

SPECIAL TEAMS

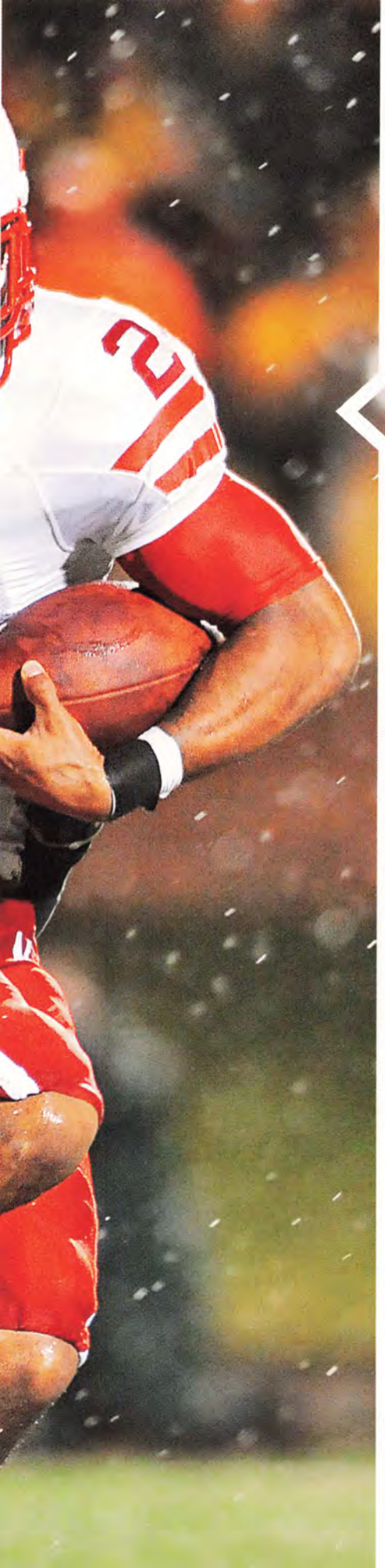
K	ALEX HENERY*	ADI KUNALIC
P	ALEX HENERY*	BRETT MAHER
KR-PR	NILES PAUL*	TIM MARLOWE

**Returning starter*

TELLING NUMBER

100 POINTS NEEDED BY ALEX HENERY TO BECOME NEBRASKA'S ALLTIME TOP SCORER (WITH 389). HE HAD 110 EACH OF THE PAST TWO YEARS.

FROM LEFT: BRAD SCHLOSS/ICON SMI; DENNY MEDLEY/US PRESSWIRE; JAMES D. SMITH/ICON SMI; MATTHEW EMMONS/US PRESSWIRE



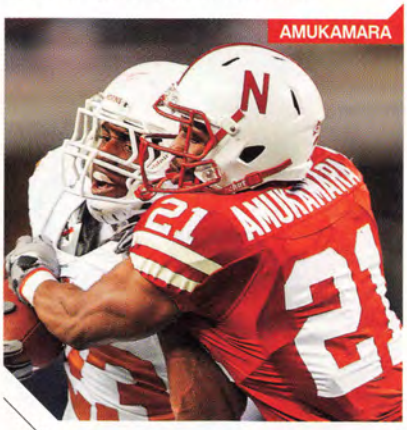
KEY RETURNEES

DE **PIERRE ALLEN** SENIOR
A third star after Ndamukong Suh and Jared Crick last year, the 6' 5" 265-pounder had two sacks and a forced fumble in the Holiday Bowl. Coach Bo Pelini calls him one of the team's most underrated players.

RB **REX BURKHEAD** SOPHOMORE
Burkhead will still back up Roy Helu Jr. at tailback, but his role will expand after rushing for 346 yards as a freshman. Many of his carries came out of the Wildcat formation, with Burkhead taking a direct snap. Expect this to become a staple of the offense in 2010.

WR **NILES PAUL** SENIOR
Nebraska's most dangerous offensive threat produced five of its eight longest plays last year. Paul averaged 19.9 yards over 40 catches and was equally explosive in the return game, averaging 27.9 yards per kickoff return and 10.7 on punt returns.

CB **PRINCE AMUKAMARA** SENIOR
An All-Big 12 performer in '09, the Huskers' leader in pass breakups (11) was a major reason why 10 of Nebraska's 14 opponents failed to complete more than 50% of their passes against the Blackshirts.



BREAKOUT PLAYER

DT **BAKER STEINKUHLER** SOPHOMORE
Poised to uphold the family reputation

The son of the great Huskers offensive lineman Dean Steinkuhler, Baker takes over the left defensive tackle spot vacated by Suh. As a backup last season the 6' 6" 290-pounder had 17 tackles. Tabbed in 2008 as the first five-star recruit ever to come out of the state of Nebraska by Rivals.com, Steinkuhler was the prize of the Huskers' recruiting class that year.

TOP RECRUIT

OT **ANDREW RODRIGUEZ** FRESHMAN
Young lineman could revive Huskers' running game

Pelini wants Nebraska to return to its power-running roots, which is why the former Aurora (Neb.) High star is so important to the program's future success. He's widely considered one of the state's top offensive line prospects in a decade.

COACH'S Q&A

BO PELINI

ON DEDICATION AND REPRESENTING THE CORNHUSKERS

SI: *When you came to Nebraska two years ago, did you know where you wanted to be at this point in your tenure?*
BP: We knew it would take time to instill our culture. The players needed to understand that just because you're at Nebraska doesn't mean you're automatically going to win. But the culture we want here is well on its way to being installed.

SI: DID YOU LEARN ANYTHING ABOUT THE TEAM FROM THE LOSS TO TEXAS IN THE BIG 12 TITLE GAME?

BP: THAT ONE HURT. BUT FROM THAT GAME IT'S CLEAR THIS PROGRAM HAS MOMENTUM. NOW OUR KIDS REALIZE THEY CAN BE PRETTY DAMN GOOD.

SI: *How did all the injuries on offense affect you last year?*
BP: We had to scale some things back, but we got a lot better this spring. I was very pleased with the progress we made.
SI: *How special can wide receiver Niles Paul be in 2010?*
BP: At times he lacks consistency, but he's getting there. If he picks up where he was at the end of last season, Niles is going to be big for us this year.
SI: *What keeps you up at night?*
BP: I worry about our kids representing the program with class, about them doing the right things academically and socially. And [at practice] I worry about getting the kids to concentrate [and] whether or not we have the dedication to be special.

HUSKERS
adidas
NEBRASKA FOOTBALL
HUSKERS
TRADITION
94
N

BREAKING THROUGH IN THE HEARTLAND

For anyone who paid attention last year only to Nebraska's *other* defensive tackle, consider this an official notice: Crick is the new Suh BY LARS ANDERSON

NEARLY EVERY CRICK WAS THERE. HIS PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS, HIS aunts and uncles and cousins. They all had traveled many miles to Waco, Texas, to see Nebraska play Baylor last Oct. 31. Looking up into the stands at his family minutes before kickoff, with most of his kin wearing his number 94 jersey and one relative waving a sign that read CRICK OR TREAT, Jared Crick, a shy, soft-spoken native of Cozad, Neb. (pop. 4,296), sensed he was about to play a special game. But he didn't sense that in three hours he would be in the Huskers' record book.

On every offensive play the Bears double-teamed left tackle Ndamukong Suh, who would win the Outland and Lombardi trophies at season's end. This meant Crick, Nebraska's right defensive tackle, faced only one offensive lineman (freshman Ivory Wade) most of the afternoon—the last time all season that would happen. Using his rare combination of strength and speed, the 6' 6", 285-pound Crick dominated Wade and the game. When the final whistle blew, he had amassed a school-record five sacks, a school-record seven tackles for loss, 13 total tackles, one fumble recovery and one pass defended in the Huskers' 20–10 victory. It was, in the words of Nebraska coach Bo Pelini, "a nearly perfect game" by a defensive player.

"I had no idea what the stats were, and I just kept making plays," Crick says. "I was kind of in the zone."

Expect more special games this year from Crick, who last season had 73 tackles, 15 tackles for loss and 9½ sacks. How good can Crick, a player whom Suh described after the Holiday Bowl as "the next Suh," be in 2010? He's already being projected by some NFL scouts as a first-round pick in the 2011 NFL draft should he forgo his senior year. "Jared has so many tools," Pelini says. "He's big, strong, athletic, explosive and just has a wonderful combination of power and speed. He's capable of being a dominant player week in and week out. He made big strides last year, and we expect him to make big strides this year. No doubt, he's special."

Growing up in Cozad, which is a three-hour drive straight west on Interstate 80 from Lincoln, Crick had one big dream as a kid: to play football for the Huskers. He accepted his football scholarship hours after it was formally offered while he was a junior at Cozad High, where he played defensive end and tight end for the football team (he had 68 tackles and 15 receptions as a senior), center for the basketball team (he averaged 12 points a game as a senior) and put the shot for the track team (he finished second in the state tournament his senior year with a throw of 60' 10¼").

EXTRA POINT THE ANNUAL PONY EXPRESS RERIDE PASSES THROUGH CRICK'S HOMETOWN OF COZAD; IT WAS ALSO ON THE OREGON TRAIL.

Texas QB Colt McCoy was a Crick sack victim.

After redshirting in 2007 Crick was a backup defensive tackle in '08 before emerging as a starter last year. Crick's impact on the program has already been profound. During his redshirt season Nebraska had 13 sacks; last season the Huskers racked up 44 sacks, which tied for second most in the country, behind Pittsburgh (48).

"There were a lot of times this spring when Jared simply couldn't be blocked," says wide receiver Niles Paul. "We'd be in the huddle and just have no answer for him. The crazy thing is, he's getting better every day." □

MARC PISCOTTY/ICON SMI (LEFT); ALBERT PENA/CSM

1971
NOVEMBER 25

NEBRASKA	35
OKLAHOMA	31

Number 1 (Nebraska) and No. 2 met on Thanksgiving in Norman, Okla., in what some fans know as the Game of the Century. The Huskers' Johnny Rodgers (20) returned a punt 72 yards for a TD for the first score in a back-and-forth battle that Nebraska pulled out when running back Jeff Kinney rushed two yards for his fourth TD with 1:38 left.

BRIAN LANKER

THE GREATEST GAMES IN BIG 12 HISTORY

The teams of today's Big 12 have long produced passionate rivalries and imperishable moments. Here are the best of the best of those timeless matchups

BY LAKEN LITMAN

54
60
27

2001
NOVEMBER 24

OKLAHOMA STATE 16
OKLAHOMA 13

The 27-point underdog Cowboys deflated the Sooners' Big 12 South title hopes with their defense. OSU's secondary picked off Oklahoma QB Nate Hybl three times, the last after Jeff Fields's 14-yard TD pass to Rashaun Woods had put the Cowboys ahead with 1:36 left. Hybl was also sacked seven times, including here by LaWaylon Brown.

MORE FOR THE AGES

Controversies, comebacks, improbable upsets and sweet revenge. These memorable showdowns had them all

TEXAS 40 MISSOURI 27 JANUARY 1, 1946
Bobby Layne had a hand–or foot–in all 40 of the Longhorns' points. He threw for two touchdowns, ran for three, caught a 50-yard touchdown pass and kicked four extra points. After the game Missouri coach Chauncey Simpson went to the Longhorns' bus to shake Layne's hand.

COLORADO 33 MISSOURI 31 OCTOBER 6, 1990
Buffaloes QB Charles Johnson scored the game-winning TD by plunging in as time expired on the now infamous "fifth down." The play was the result of an officiating error and went unnoticed by virtually everyone at Missouri's Faurot Field. Colorado went on to finish 11-1-1 and win its only national title.

TEXAS A&M 36 KANSAS STATE 33 (2OT) DECEMBER 5, 1998
Aggies running back Sirr Parker rushed for a touchdown and a two-point conversion late in regulation to tie the Big 12 title game–and then came even greater heroics. With Kansas State up 33–30 in the second OT, A&M faced a third-and-17 at the Wildcats' 32 when Parker caught a pass on a slant pattern and took it in for the score that beat previously second-ranked, undefeated and national-championship-eyeing K-State.

OKLAHOMA 31 NEBRASKA 14 OCTOBER 28, 2000
Number 1 Nebraska, led by future Heisman winner Eric Crouch, seemed unbeatable, particularly after No. 3 Oklahoma gave up two early TDs and fell behind 14–0. But that was all the Sooners' D would allow, as QB Josh Heupel led them to victory in Norman. It was the catalyst for Oklahoma's first national title in 15 years.

TEXAS TECH 48 TEXAS A&M 47 (OT) OCTOBER 5, 2002
Down 35–17 at the start of the fourth, Tech, led by multipurpose threat Wes Welker, exploded for 21 straight points in less than 10 minutes. The Aggies responded to take a 41–38 lead with 1:40 left. But QB Kliff Kingsbury led a seven-play 56-yard drive to tie the game. In OT, A&M scored but missed the extra point. Then Kingsbury hit Nehemiah Glover on a 10-yard TD to win it.

BAYLOR 35 TEXAS A&M 34 (OT) OCTOBER 30, 2004
Trailing by one in overtime, QB Shawn Bell found receiver Dominique Zeigler in the end zone for a two-point conversion that lifted unranked Baylor over No. 16 A&M. It also ended the Bears' 19-year winless stretch against the Aggies.

TEXAS 45 OKLAHOMA 35 OCTOBER 11, 2008
After trailing the No. 1 Sooners nearly all game, Colt McCoy and the No. 5 Horns seized control late in this thrilling Red River Rivalry game. The win became Texas's lifeline in a three-way Big 12 South tie among Texas, OU and Texas Tech. But the BCS computer results invited Oklahoma to the conference championship, which led to a berth in the national title game.

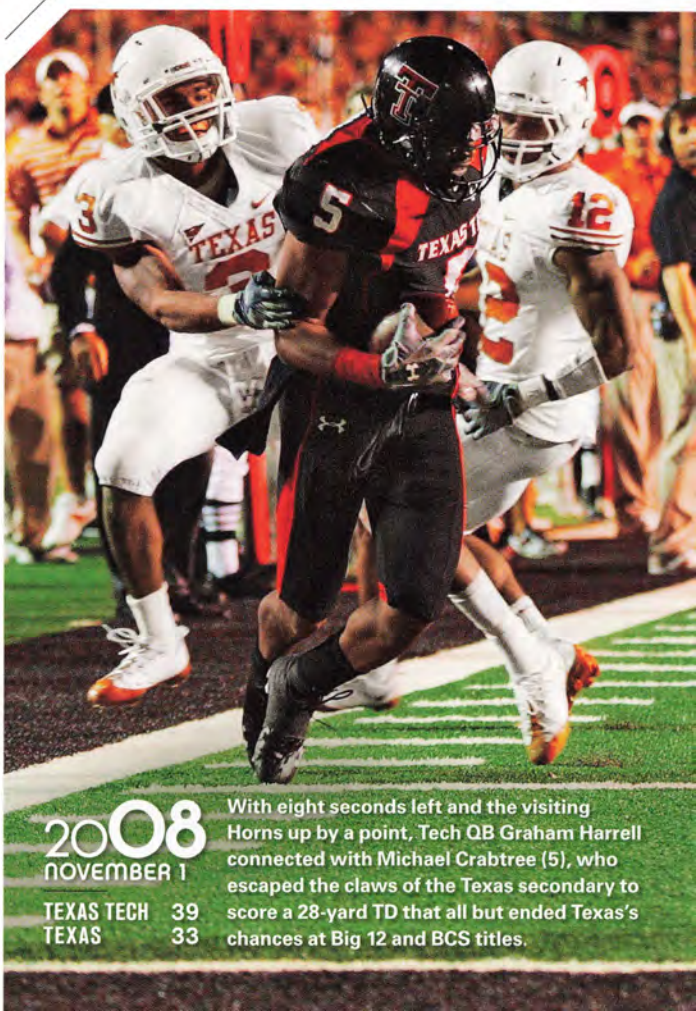
KANSAS 40 MISSOURI 37 NOVEMBER 29, 2008
Out for revenge against the Jayhawks' rivals, Kansas QB Todd Reesing connected with receiver Kerry Meier five times on a 67-yard game-winning drive in the final two minutes of the Border War to beat Chase Daniel and the Tigers.

TEXAS 13 NEBRASKA 12 DECEMBER 5, 2009
With seconds left on the clock, Colt McCoy scrambled and almost waited too long to throw the ball out-of-bounds. The clock showed 0:00 as the Huskers rushed the field thinking they had won the game 12–10, but officials ruled that there was one second left. Then Hunter Lawrence stepped up and nailed a 46-yard field goal as time expired, propelling the Longhorns to the BCS national title game.

1963
OCTOBER 12

TEXAS	28
OKLAHOMA	7

Running back Tommy Ford (above, with ball) led the No. 2 Longhorns to a 14–0 halftime lead over the No. 1 Sooners and Texas cruised to victory as All-America defensive tackle Scott Appleton had 18 stops for the Horns. The next week Darrell Royal's team earned the top spot in the polls and never relinquished it on the way to its first national championship.



2008
NOVEMBER 1

TEXAS TECH	39
TEXAS	33

With eight seconds left and the visiting Horns up by a point, Tech QB Graham Harrell connected with Michael Crabtree (5), who escaped the claws of the Texas secondary to score a 28-yard TD that all but ended Texas's chances at Big 12 and BCS titles.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: J. PAT CARTER/AP; NEIL LEIFER; DARREN CARROLL

1958
OCTOBER 11

TEXAS	**15**
OKLAHOMA	**14**

Down 14–8, heavy underdog Texas drove 77 yards to the Oklahoma seven. On third down Longhorns coach Darrell Royal switched QBs, going back to junior Bobby Lackey, who then hit Bobby Bryant with a jump pass to tie the game with 3:10 left. Lackey added the extra point to seal the win.

2007
NOVEMBER 24

MISSOURI	**36**
KANSAS	**28**

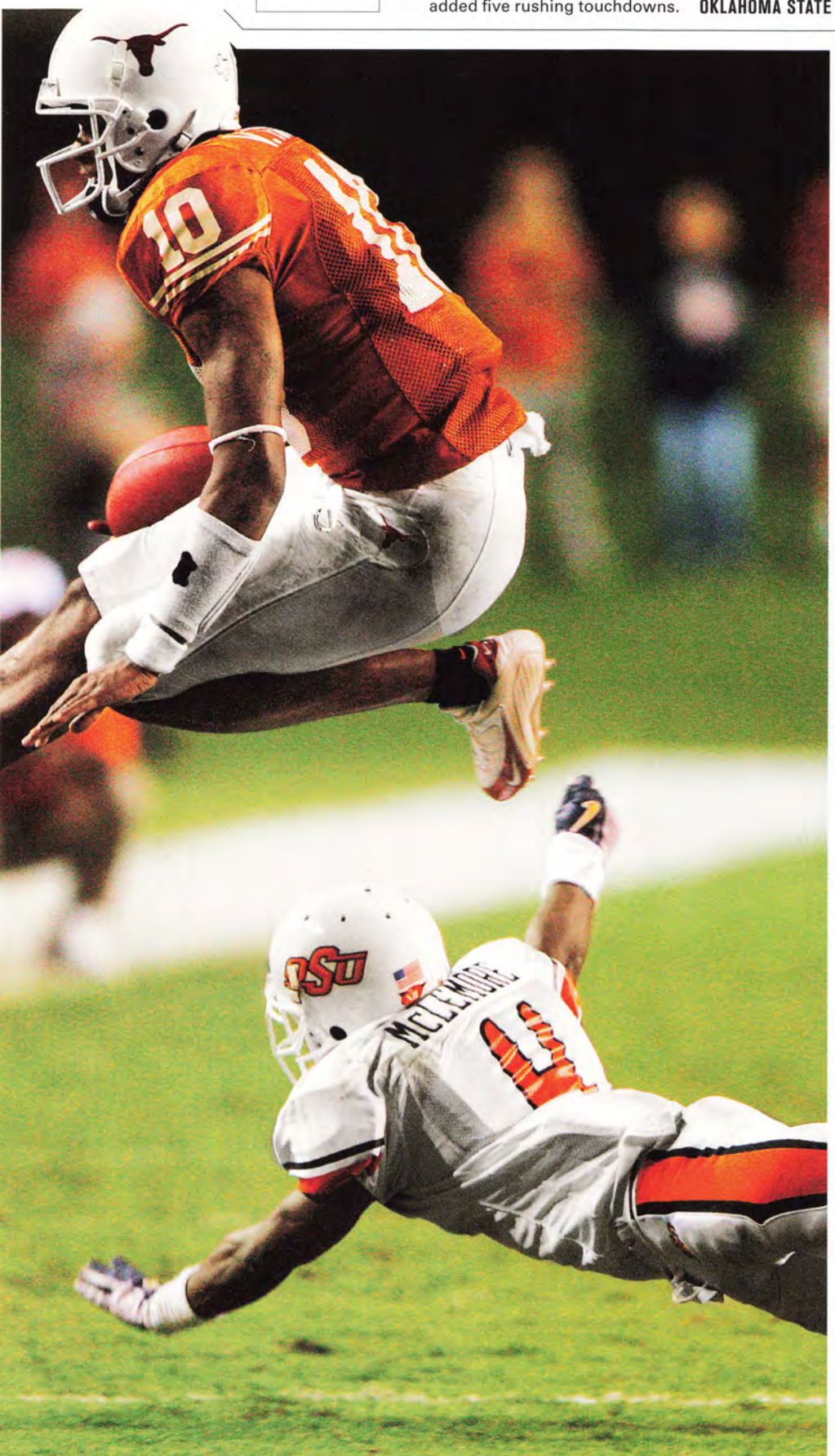
QB Chase Daniel and wideout Danario Alexander (81) had the No. 3 Tigers up 28–7 in the fourth, before Todd Reesing and the No. 2 Jawhawks rallied. But an unfruitful onside kick, two missed field goals and a sack of Reesing ensured Kansas's loss and lifted Mizzou to No. 1.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: DAVID E. KLUTHO (2); TED KIRK (2); JOSH MERWIN; DAVID E. KLUTHO; MARVIN E. NEWMAN

Vince Young led the biggest comeback in Texas history, erasing a 35–7 deficit. He completed 12 straight passes (a school record) at one point and ran for 123 yards. Cedric Benson added five rushing touchdowns.

2004
NOVEMBER 6

TEXAS	**56**
OKLAHOMA STATE	**35**



1997
NOVEMBER 8

NEBRASKA	**45**
MISSOURI	**38**

Underdog Missouri led 38–31 with seven ticks left, but No. 1 Nebraska was on the 12. As Huskers back Shevin Wiggins got hit by Tigers safety Julian Jones (14), Wiggins accidentally kicked the ball in the air; receiver Matt Davison (3) caught it in the end zone, forcing OT as Mizzou fans stormed the field thinking the Tigers had won. QB Scott Frost scored in the extra period.

2002
OCTOBER 12

IOWA STATE	31
TEXAS TECH	17

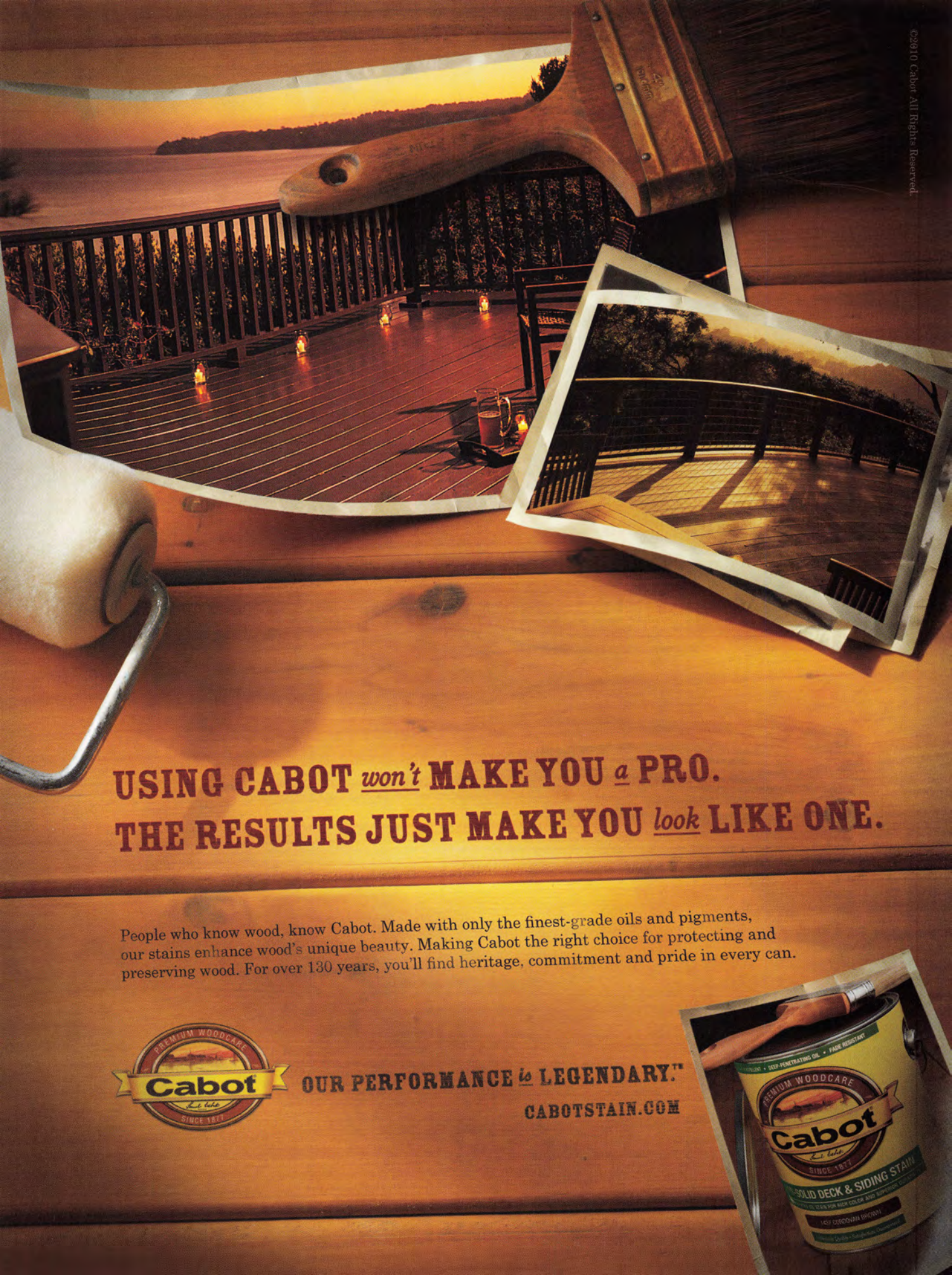
QB Seneca Wallace (15) put Iowa State ahead 10–3 in the third quarter with a 12-yard TD run that had Red Raiders chasing him all over the field for 18 seconds. With the sideline-to-sideline running, pump-faking and tackle-dodging, Wallace actually covered 115 yards on the play. He ran for another TD and threw for a third in the game.

2001
OCTOBER 27

NEBRASKA	20
OKLAHOMA	10

Number 3 Nebraska tricked No. 1 Oklahoma with the 41 Flash Pass, in which receiver Mike Stuntz pretended to run a reverse, but passed back to QB Eric Crouch (7), who ran for a 63-yard fourth-quarter TD for the game's final score. The outcome ended OU's 21-game winning streak.

FROM TOP: DOUG WELLS/THE DES MOINES REGISTER; DAMIAN STROHMEYER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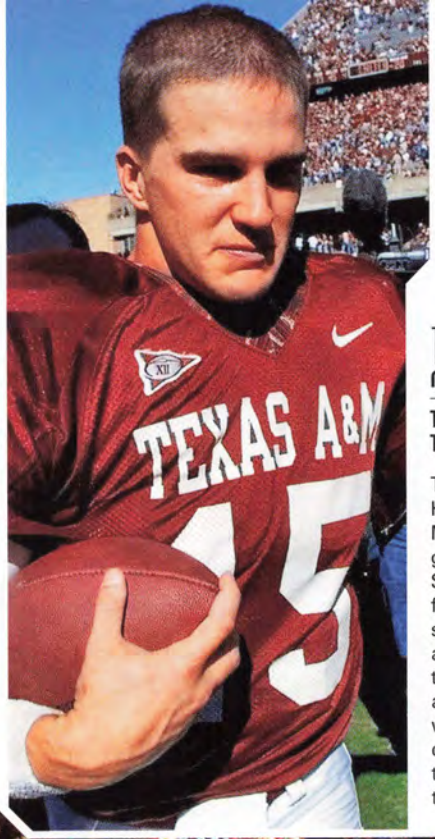

1999
NOVEMBER 26

TEXAS A&M	**20**
TEXAS	**16**

The Aggies upset the Horns behind QB Randy McCown (15), but the game, played in College Station, was significant for the way the schools set aside their rivalry and unified in grief over the 11 A&M students and one alumnus who had died in the construction of the traditional A&M bonfire the previous week.

1996
AUGUST 31

KANSAS STATE	**21**
TEXAS TECH	**14**

In the first Big 12 game receiver Kevin Lockett (83) and Kansas State led by a TD with 0:38 left. Then safety Mario Smith nailed Red Raiders receiver Donnie Hart after he caught a pass three yards from the goal line; K-State recovered the fumble to seal the win.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: DAMIAN STROHMEYER; ERIC GAY/AP (2)

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02

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2001
OCTOBER 6

OKLAHOMA 14
TEXAS 3

In the 96th installment of the Red River Rivalry, Oklahoma safety Roy Williams made a Supermanesque leap over Texas back Brett Robin to jar the ball from the grip of QB Chris Simms in the fourth quarter. The ball squirted into the hands of linebacker Teddy Lehman, whose two-yard TD return widened the Sooners' lead to 14–3.

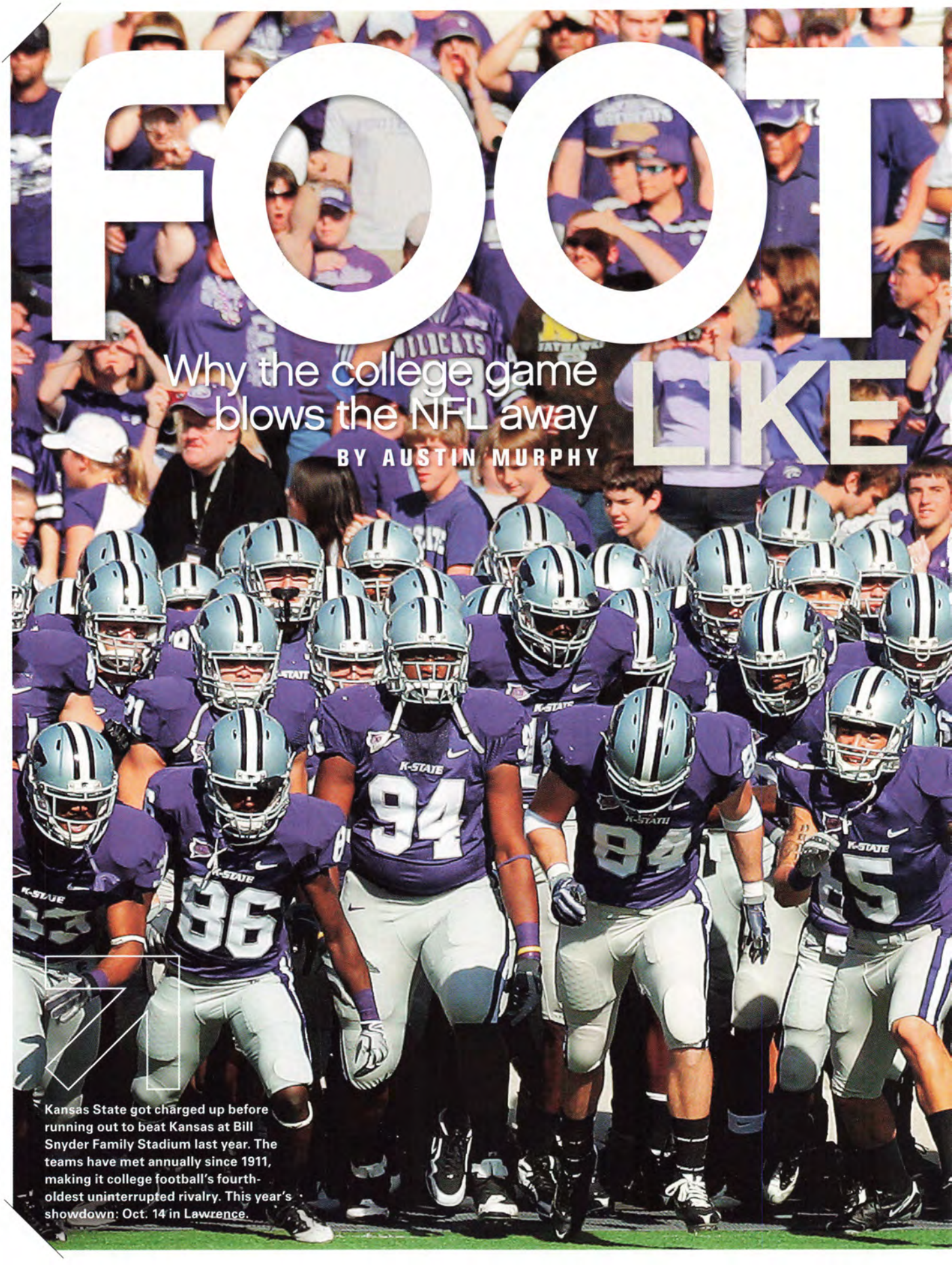
JOHN BIEVER

AMS
8
1
MS

FOOT LIKE

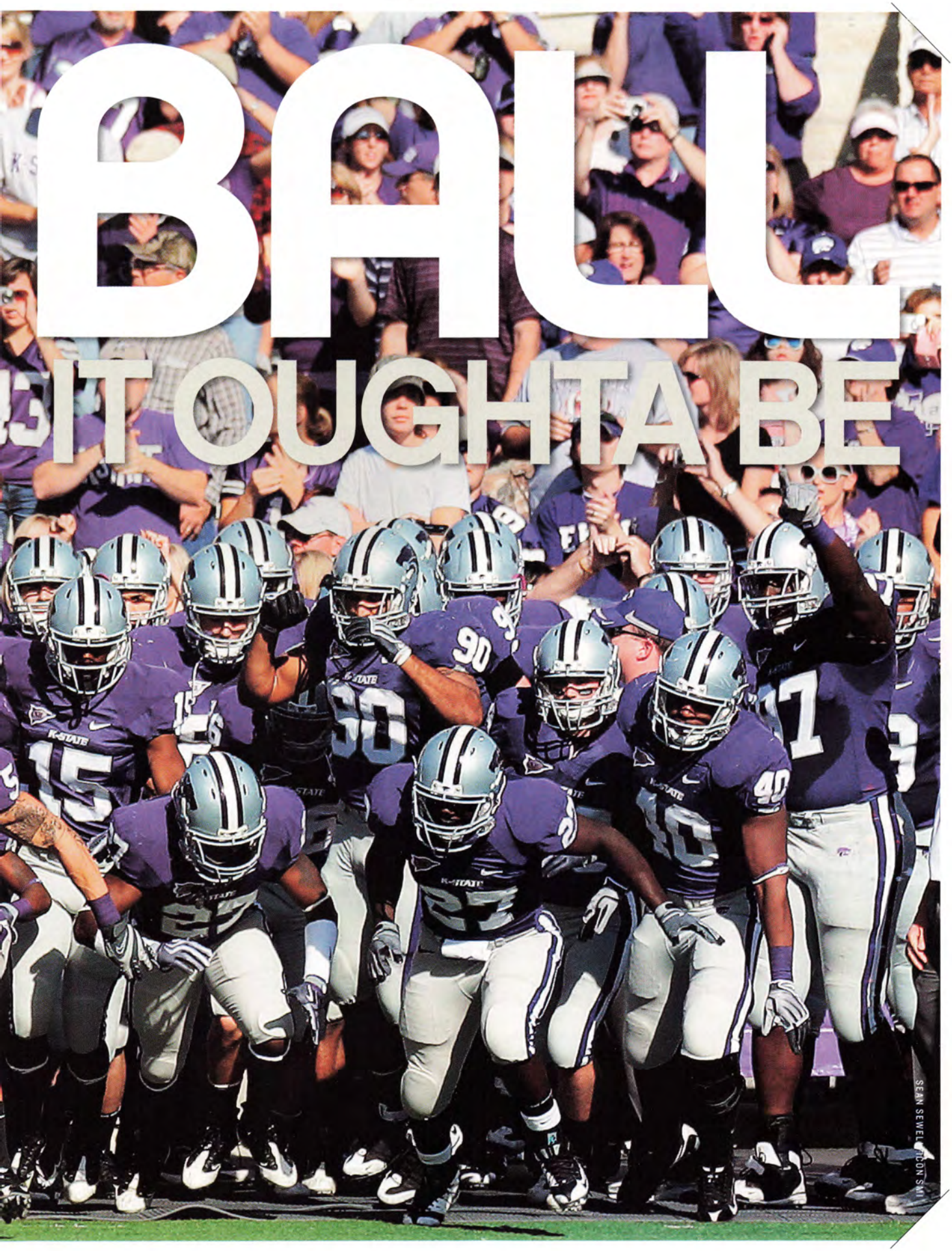
Why the college game blows the NFL away

BY AUSTIN MURPHY



Kansas State got charged up before running out to beat Kansas at Bill Snyder Family Stadium last year. The teams have met annually since 1911, making it college football's fourth-oldest uninterrupted rivalry. This year's showdown: Oct. 14 in Lawrence.

BALL IT OUGHTA BE



SEAN SEWELL/DON SMI

DARN RIGHT IT WAS A TURBULENT OFF-SEASON for college football. So many changes. Let the Pac-10 henceforth be known as the Pac-12, the Big 12 as the Big 12 Lite, and the Big Ten as Delany's Dozen. And the FASTEN SEAT BELTS sign is still illuminated. Superconferences are on the horizon. ¶ While these changes—actual or proposed—may leave some partisans disoriented, disappointed and disgusted, none of those alterations can undermine the premise of this essay: that college football reigns supreme over the NFL. With its ancient rivalries and revered traditions, its oversized passions and colorful characters, the college game is this country's most compelling sport, warts and all. ¶ Of course, even transcendent beauties have flaws. (You'd be surprised how many of the SI swimsuit models smoke.) And in this case the flaw is avarice. Conference

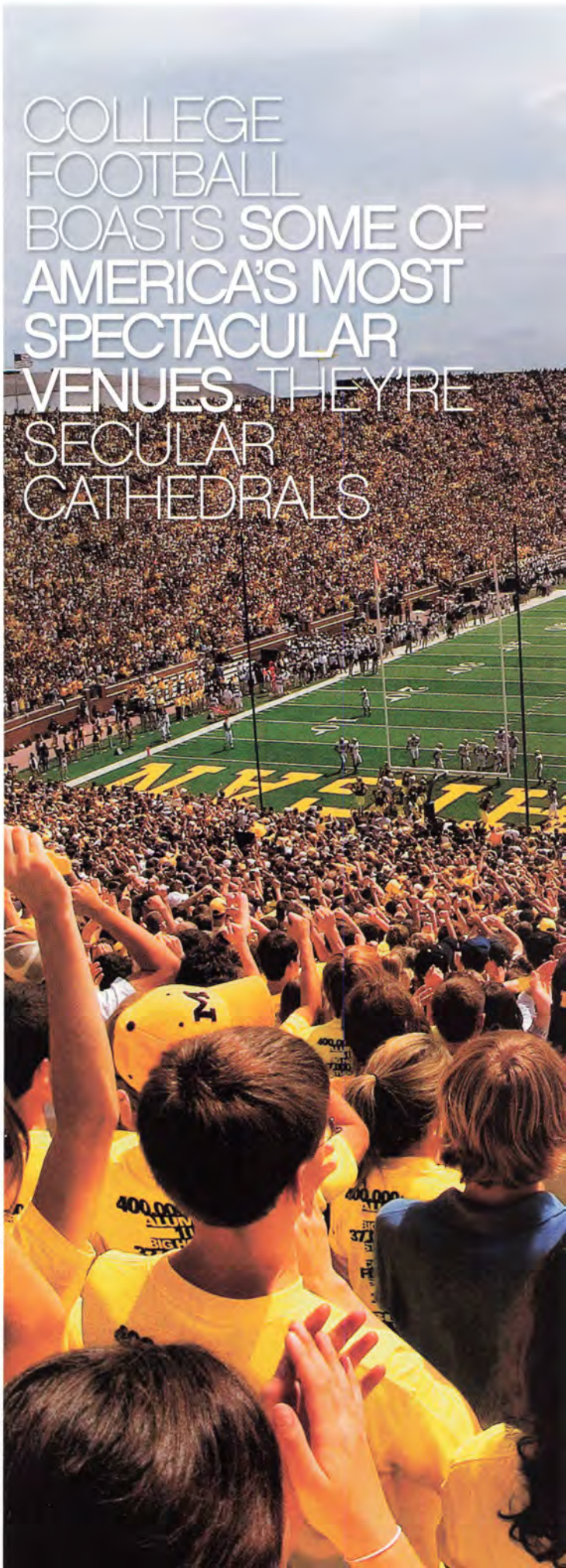
Clemson players have rubbed Howard's Rock since 1967; a member of the Buckeyes' marching band (a seasoned sousaphonist) has dotted the *i* in *Ohio* before games since the '30s; and Michigan will begin its 84th season at the Big House.

commissioners continue to hyperventilate over those superconferences and the stratospheric sums they'll be able to wring from TV networks by expanding their respective league's footprints from, say, 12 to 14 or 16 teams. Who knows, maybe more. You can bet that Larry Scott, the Pac-10's ambitious first-year commish—who calls his charge nothing less than "reinventing" his conference—isn't about to content himself with poaching just Colorado and Utah.

Such dramatic expansion will result in contraction elsewhere. Just ask the Big 12, whose long June weekend in intensive care ended only when Texas decided not to bail. At least for now.

Superconferences will lead to the extinction of some treasured rivalries, just as they will accelerate the polarization between the college football's haves and have-nots. The rich will get richer. (And the TCU Horned Frogs will still end up kicking their backsides more often than not.) And you know what? Bring it on. Change is inevitable; it's healthy; it's good, unless you're the Big East and Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany is eyeballing you the way a boa looks at a fluffy white bunny.

However the landscape of this sport changes during the next several seasons, college football will still be more beautiful, more



FROM LEFT: DALE ZANINE/US PRESSWIRE; JOHN BIEVER; TONY DING/ICON SMI

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interesting and more fun than the dome-sheltered, corporate, conformist game that's played in the NFL. College football will look different but remain strong.

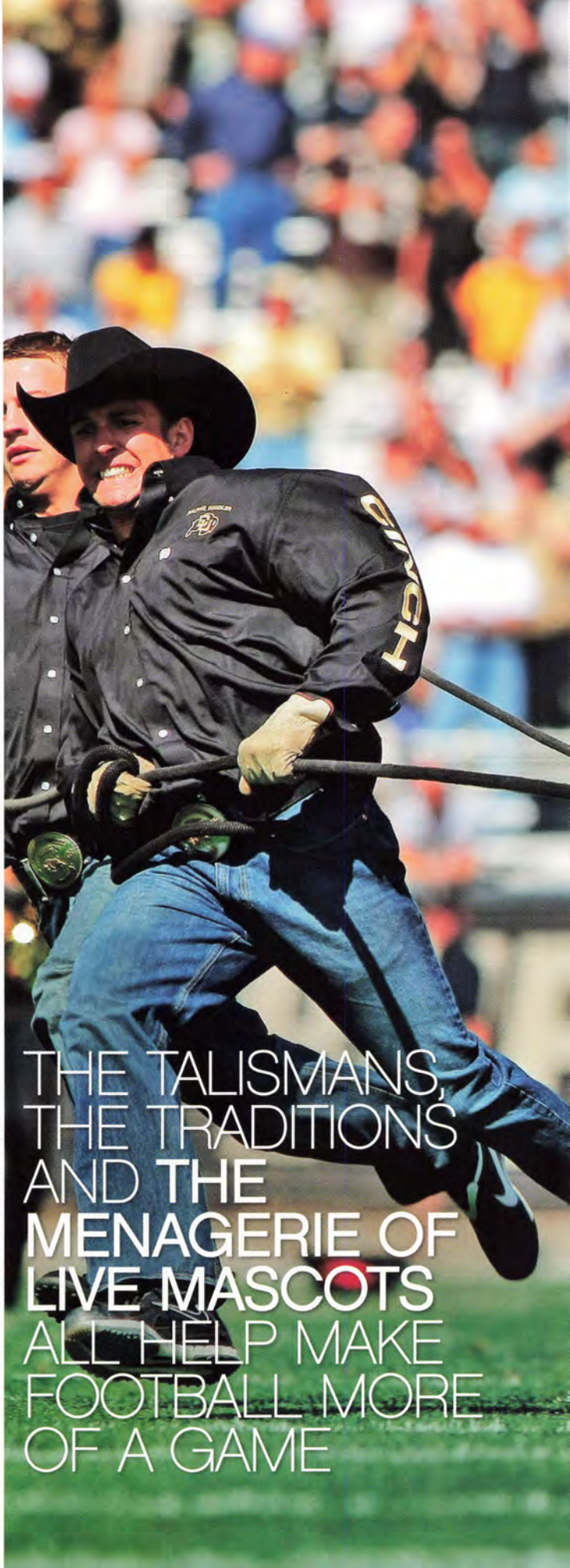
Whether the SEC is made up of 12 teams (as currently constituted) or four four-team divisions, undergrads at Ole Miss will continue to dress up for tailgates in the Grove, those stately oaks casting blessed shade outside Vaught-Hemingway Stadium. However supersized the Pac-10 becomes, the USC Trojans won't stop "tapping in" at Goux's Gate before every practice. The Leland Stanford Junior University Marching Band, which once commemorated the flight of O.J. Simpson by driving a white Bronco around the Stanford Stadium track, will continue to amuse, entertain and offend. Regardless of the state of the ACC, the Clemson Tigers will refuse to descend into Death Valley until they've rubbed Howard's Rock. Even if (or when) the Big 12 truly implodes, forcing Missouri into the arms of, say, the Mountain West, Mizzou students will still celebrate huge wins by lugging the goalposts the 17 blocks from Faurot Field to Harpo's, the

The Texas Pom squad stands out in leather chaps; Stanford's band horns in with zany stunts (coming out in a white Ford Bronco to mock USC's O.J. Simpson, for example); and heavy-duty mascot Ralphie sets the pace for Colorado.

renowned public house whose bartenders will then dispense small hacksaws to patrons so everyone can go out and get a piece. And isn't that what college is all about?

DON'T GET ME WRONG, IF THERE'S AN NFL GAME ON, I have trouble walking past the TV. I've been on the college football beat for 15 of the last 20 years but covered the NFL for five years in the mid-'90s. *Monday Night Football* is a ritual in my house, even though Tony Kornheiser was an acquired taste I never acquired and the braying of Hank Williams Jr. makes me wince. Literally. I like NFL football as much as the next guy. I'm just saying that, for a bunch of reasons, I prefer the college game. I mean *much* prefer. I mean, it's not even close.

O.K., let's give credit where it's due. The NFL has bigger, better, faster athletes than we see in the college game. Hmm. What else. For a sportswriter, it offers the advantage of having more direct flights. Other than that, to my way of thinking, it's no contest. Better athletes do not equal better football. There is less risk-taking in the NFL, less variety, more cautious coaches spending more time scrutinizing percentages and playing not to lose. The high school



THE TALISMANS, THE TRADITIONS AND **THE MENAGERIE OF LIVE MASCOTS** ALL HELP MAKE FOOTBALL MORE OF A GAME

FROM LEFT: GREG NELSON; KYLE TERADA/US PRESSWIRE; DOUG PENSINGER/GETTY IMAGES

Whatever the Trojans' in-game philosophy is under new coach Lane Kiffin, they'll be led out by the Song Girls, who carefully hone their game too, devising 36 new dance routines each season.

CHRIS WILLIAMS/ICON SMI

football coach and prolific author John T. Reed has identified what he calls the "principles of contrarianism," and they are much more in evidence on Saturdays than Sundays. "I'm all for giving each team an equal chance to win with regard to spending limits and the draft," Reed has written. "However, when parity takes the form of uniformity of offensive tactics and strategy, it is not entertaining at all. It is boring."

College football is many things, but homogenous isn't one of them. With its smorgasbord of offensive attacks—from the no-huddle, hurry-up offenses common in the Big 12 to the triple options favored by the service academies to the pistol offenses recently unholstered at UCLA and Arkansas—the college game offers much more variety than the conformist, cookie-cutter NFL.

Around the same time that Tim Tebow started flummoxing SEC defenses by passing over the linebackers on one play and knocking the snot out of them the next, the then Florida Gator started hearing the questions, the doubts: Yeah, he's a winner and a born leader, but can he play QB in the League?

We're about to find out. Yes, Tebow has had to tweak his release point, and no, he's not the prototypical NFL quarterback. (Tebow is actually more multidimensional than that: a superior athlete.) Maybe Tebow will pan out with the Denver Broncos and open-minded head coach Josh McDaniels. Maybe he won't. But if Tebow never thrives as a pro, well, the way I see it, if one of the most exciting players in the history of college football can't find a home in the NFL, that's more an indictment of the League than it is of the player.

FOR ALL THE COLLEGE GAME'S IMPERFECTIONS—THE LOW graduation rates of players at certain schools; the embarrassing, perennial shortage of black men in head coaching positions; the cash-fueled drift toward those superconferences; etc.—it remains far more attractive than the NFL.

I'm not just talking about the USC Song Girls or the leather chaps sported by the members of the Texas Pom squad. College football boasts some of the most spectacular venues in America—secular cathedrals like Notre Dame Stadium and the Big House; Bryant-Denny and the Rose Bowl. Yes, Lambeau Field and Arrowhead Stadium are distinctive and drenched in history. The remaining NFL venues range from charmless, aging hulks to inoffensive, antiseptic life-support systems for luxury boxes to the nine domed and hermetically sealed structures rising over their surroundings like toadstools.

It goes without saying that playing on fake grass in a glorified, climate-controlled terrarium drains some of the character, the challenge, the *fun* from football. It is, at its core, unnatural. But it's a good business decision to put your team under a dome.

1930 ALABAMA
worn by Fred Sington

1940 MICHIGAN
worn by Tom Harmon

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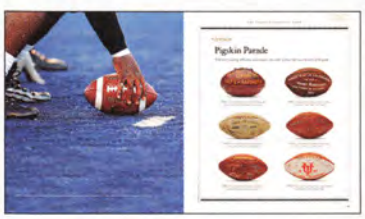
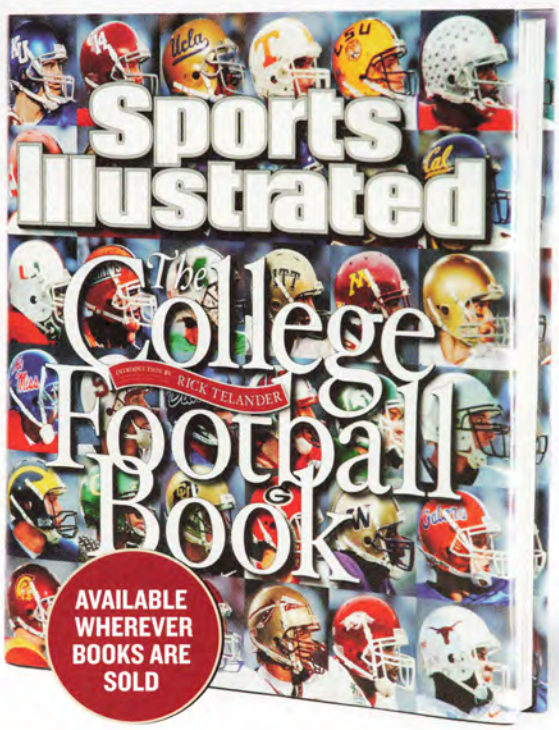
Introduction by
Rick Telander



A Virtual
College Football Museum



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Riveting rivalries: Navy and QB George Walsh (11) won this 1954 installment of its annual game with Army and leads the series 54-49-7; Florida slowed Georgia's Knowshon Moreno during a 49–10 Gators rout in 2008; and Marquise Goodwin and Texas pulled in a 16–13 win over Oklahoma in the '09 Red River Rivalry.

(A warm, dry, comfortable fan is a fan more likely to keep coming back—to keep opening his wallet.) And the bottom line, it goes without saying, guides every decision made in the NFL. That's why, a few years back, the league put the kibosh on an Indianapolis church's plans to show the Super Bowl on a big screen, tut-tutting that such a screening would violate copyright laws. Concern for that bottom line is also how Miami Dolphins general manager Jeff Ireland justified asking a wide receiver, during a predraft interview in April, whether the player's mother had been a prostitute. (That's a *general manager* we're talking about, not some just-hired underling.) If the player had childhood traumas, Ireland's reasoning went, the club wanted to know about them before investing millions in him.

Sure, college football is a cold business in its own right. Ask the surviving members of the Big 12 or the schools of the Big East. The commissioners of the BCS conferences bow to no one when it comes to their keen interest in maximizing profits. Yet there is something about the college game, with its marching bands and student sections—where the chest-painted, fright-wigged loon to your left is also the guy you see three mornings a week in molecular biology—with its talismans, its traditions and its menagerie of live animal mascots, that makes it . . . more of a game. College football isn't just older than the NFL, it is less rational, less *sane* and, as a result, much more compelling.

There is something at once whimsical and transcendent in the sight of an Ohio State senior sousaphonist high-kicking his way to a spot above the third letter of Script Ohio, in the moments before kickoff, then dramatically "dotting the *i*." How cathartic it must be for John Short, a middle-aged insurance salesman who was attending his 27th straight Georgia-Florida game when I met him, to don his foam Bulldogs helmet and bone-shaped BITE ME, GATORS bow tie, inflate the Hairy Dawg blow-up figure atop his van, then commence mixing his famed (and feared) 14-ingredient, antifreeze-colored "Gator-killer punch."

These are the passions spawned by college football's ancient feuds, which have no NFL equivalent, and which serve as border disputes and culture clashes all at once. Two of the best known of those—Florida versus Georgia and Texas versus Oklahoma—engender such hostility that they must be contested in neutral settings. Of course, if the decision to play at a neutral site were based on ill will alone, Michigan and Ohio State would play their annual showdown in, say, Toledo or Kalamazoo. The Game, as it is known in the heartland, packs more history and hatred than any other rivalry, not just in college football but also, arguably,

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: MARK KAUFFMAN; ALBERT PENA/CSM; DAMIAN STROHMEYER

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in all of sport. I reflected on this fact several years ago while nursing what can only be described as a modest-sized pail of beer at the Newport Music Hall on North High Street, just a mile from Ohio Stadium in Columbus. On the eve of the Game, a punk band called the Dead Schembechlers ripped through a set of half-screamed numbers like *Bomb Ann Arbor Now*, *M Means Moron* and *I Wipe My A-- with Wolverine Fur*. Out of respect for Schembechler, who had died *that morning*, the band changed its name to The Bastard Sons of Woody Hayes.

Earlier that week, I'd spoken with then Buckeyes wideout Anthony Gonzalez, whose father had played for Schembechler at Michigan but lost his scholarship after getting injured.

Did his father leave on bad terms with Bo? "My dad?" said Gonzo. "He has great things to say about Bo. *Great* things."

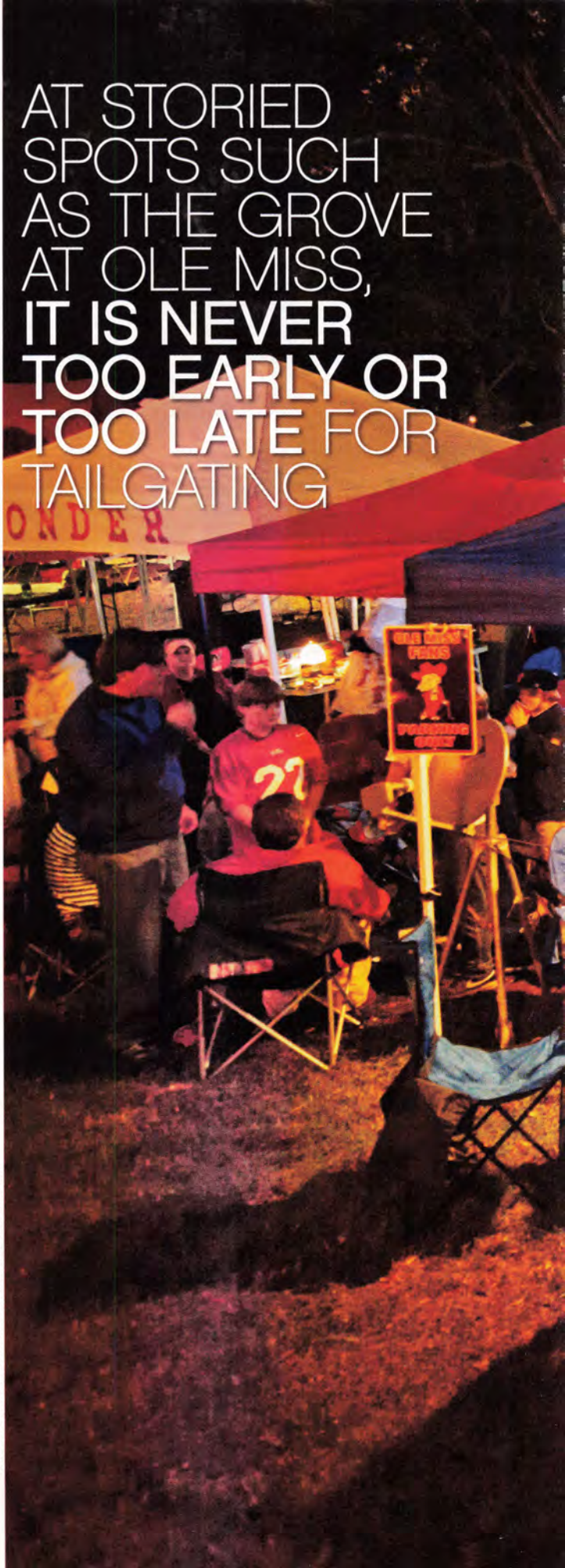
Gonzalez, now an Indianapolis Colt, was a philosophy major with a 4.0 GPA nearly every academic quarter. I remember his admonition when I confessed that I'd never read Plato: "You've *got* to read *The Republic*."

Just outside Notre Dame Stadium, players can seek inspiration from the mural of Touchdown Jesus; at TCU fans have learned that upsets are always possible; and in Oxford, Miss., the faithful gather in the shelter of the old oaks.

I saw Gonzo a few months later at the NFL's annual scouting combine, so named, I suspect, because it combines elements of a beauty pageant, a cattle auction and hard-core interrogation sessions. Like all other prospective draftees, he was dressed in an NFL-issued gray sweatshirt, on which was stamped his league-assigned four-character code. We chatted while he was shuttling between physical and psychological tests. He was bemused, I recall, by some of the Bizarro World questions posed to him by the grim-faced NFL personnel "experts." "Whatever you do," I advised him, "don't mention Plato."

He smiled, then went through some door to a place where I was not allowed to follow. For guys whose goal it is to play at the next level, the combine is a necessary part of the process. But I thought of it then and think of it now as a kind of rendering plant where fun goes to die. □

SPORTS ILLUSTRATED *senior writer Austin Murphy's 2007 book,* Saturday Rules, *a lively and comprehensive claim for the college game's supremacy over the NFL, is now available in paperback.*



FROM LEFT: JOE RAYMOND/AP; VLADIMIR CHERRY/US PRESSWIRE; BILL FRAKES

OleMiss

TALL, TOOTHSOME AND DEVOTED TO U

Cowboys and Tigers and Bears, oh, my! Here are the true faces of the Big 12—the ever-loyal mascots without whom game day wouldn't be the same

MISSOURI

NEBRASKA

KANSAS STATE

IOWA STATE

COLORADO

OKLAHOMA STATE

BAYLOR

TEXAS

OKLAHOMA

TEXAS A&M

KANSAS

TEXAS TECH

JOHN RIVERA/ICON SMI (BAYLOR); DUSTIN BRADFORD/ICON SMI (COLORADO); STEPHEN MALLY/ICON SMI (IOWA STATE); KENNY FELT/ICON SMI (KANSAS); DENNY MEDLEY/US PRESSWIRE (KANSAS STATE, MISSOURI); MANNY FLORES/ICON SMI (NEBRASKA, OKLAHOMA STATE); J.P. WILSON/ICON SMI (OKLAHOMA); JOHN ALBRIGHT/ICON SMI (TEXAS); AARON M. SPRECHER/GETTY IMAGES (TEXAS A&M); STEVEN LEJA/SOUTHCREEK GLOBAL (TEXAS TECH)

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